132 PAGES OF THE BEST COMICS FEATURES, INTERVIEWS & REVIEWS

COMIC HEROES

COMICS FOR EVERYONE

BERNIE WRIGHTSON
A TRIBUTE TO THE MASTER OF HORROR

STRANGE THINGS
WHY COMICS ARE GOING BACK TO THE '80S

HEROES UNITED!

JUSTICE LEAGUE

THE REBIRTH OF A SUPERTEAM

SPIDER-MAN
THE GREATEST STORIES EVER TOLD!

Future

PLUS AMERICAN GODS! CALEXIT! SEX CRIMINALS! SLAYER!

IncognitoComics.com

EST 1909

INTO COMICS?

Over 1 Million items from the 1930's Onwards.
Comics - Action Figures - Toys - Statues - Busts
Autographs - Graphic Novels - Manga

75,000 Unique Items For Sale Online!

JOB DONE!

Incognito Comics & Collectables
PO Box 431, Dover, Kent, CT16 9ED
Tel 01304 832335
EMAIL: sales@incognitocomics.co.uk

eBay Power Seller - Amazon Preferred Seller
Listed as: Incognito Comics And Collectables

JOIN US @ INCOGNITOCOMICS

All Marvel characters and the distinctive likeness(es) thereof are Trademarks & Copyright © 1941-2012 Marvel Characters, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

COMIC HEROES
COMICS FOR EVERYONE

Editor Will Salmon
Art Editor Andy McGregor
Production Editor Alex Summersby

CONTRIBUTORS
Carl Anka, Sam Ashurst, Hugh Armitage, David Barnett, Dave Bradley, Abigail Chandler, Rosie Fletcher, Paul Gravett, Miles Hamer, Marc Jackson, Stephen Jewell, Graham Kibble-White, Rob Lane, Claire Lim, James Lovegrove, Kimberley Margaux, Joel Meadows, Leah Moore, Paul Rainey, Karl Stock, Alasdair Stuart

COVER IMAGE
Courtesy of DC Comics

COMIC HEROES WOULD LIKE TO THANK...
Clark Bull and DC. Chris D'Lando and Marvel. Megan Connor and Dark Horse. Briah Skelly and Image. Matt Fraction and Chip Zdarsky. Bruce Mytton. Nicky Gotobed. Mike Molcher. Mike Garley. Roger Species. Rich Edwards and *SFX*. Jane Crowther and *Total Film*. Holly McIntosh.

ADVERTISING
Commercial Sales Director Clare Dove
Advertising Sales Manager Simon Rawle
Director of Agency Sales Matt Downs
Head of Strategic Partnerships Clare Jonik
For advertising queries, please contact Steven Pyatt on 01225 687713

MARKETING
Marketing Executive Emma Clapp
Head of Subscriptions Sharon Todd
Direct Marketing Campaign Manager William Hardy

CIRCULATION AND LICENSING
Senior Licensing & Syndication Manager Matt Ellis (0)1225 442244

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION
Production Controller Vivienne Calvert
Head of Production UK & US Mark Constance
Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons on behalf of Future
Distributed in the UK by Marketforce (UK), 2nd Floor, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU
Overseas distribution by Marketforce

LICENSING
International Director Matt Ellis, Tel +44 (0)1225 442244

MANAGEMENT
Group Editor-In-Chief Jane Crowther
Editorial Director Paul Newman
Creative Director, Magazines Aaron Asadi
All email addresses are [firstname].[lastname]@futurenet.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS
UK reader order line and enquiries 0844 848 2852
Overseas reader order line & enquiries +44 (0)1604 251 045
Online www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk

Future is an award-winning international media group and leading digital business. We reach more than 49 million international consumers a month and create world-class content and advertising solutions for passionate consumers online, on tablet and smartphone and in print.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR).
www.futureplc.com

Chief executive Zillah Byng-Thorne
Non-executive chairman Peter Allen
Chief financial officer Penny Ladkin-Brand
Tel +44 (0)207 042 4000 (London) +44 (0)1225 442 244 (Bath)

All contents © 2017 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced, stored, transmitted or used in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information.

You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price and other details of products or services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any changes or updates to them. If you submit unsolicited material to us, you automatically grant Future a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in all editions of the magazine, including licensed editions worldwide and in any physical or digital format throughout the world. Any material you submit is sent at your risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents or subcontractors shall be liable for loss or damage.

recycle
When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.
We encourage you to recycle this magazine, either through your usual household recyclable waste collection service or at a recycling site.

MIX
Paper from responsible sources
FSC
FSC® C007184
We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from well managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. Future Publishing and its paper suppliers have been independently certified in accordance with the rules of the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council)

WELCOME!

EDITOR'S PHOTO © 2015 KEVIN LOWE

Thanks for joining us. This is my final issue of *Comic Heroes* as I move on to pastures new. Fear not, the mag is continuing with a new editor in place for our 18 July issue. Please indulge me for a moment though as I use my last intro as an Oscars-style thank-you speech...

I was a fan of the mag when it launched under Jes Bickham in 2010. I'd like to thank him, as well as Matt Bielby, Dave Golder and mighty Rob Power for getting the magazine to this point.

I would like to thank Rosie Fletcher and Dave Bradley, who hired me for this gig, the two finest magazine folk I have ever had the pleasure of working with.

I'd like to say a special sexy thank you to all of our writers, designers and production staff – especially *Comic Heroes* stalwart Alex Summersby – who have endured absurd deadlines and my occasional (OK, actually fairly regular) sweary outbursts.

But above all I would like to thank *you*. This little mag has proven remarkably resilient and is now in its seventh year. Print mags are an expensive luxury these days, and I appreciate every single one of you for supporting us. Comics are great, aren't they?

Will

Will Salmon, Editor

CONTENTS

Issue 31 / April 2017

NEWS

6 / HEAT VISION

All the comic news, from the latest titles to top events.

14 / JIRO TANIGUCHI

A tribute to the masterful manga artist, who has recently passed away.

20 / OPINION

Leah Moore on the women who are changing comics.

22 / KA-PUNCH!

Comedy capers from our kiddie crime-fighter. Cor. Plus an interview with his creator, comics artist Marc Jackson.

24 / GREAT ART

Beautiful (and violent) pencils from Geof Darrow.

SHAPERS OF WORLDS

26 / MATTEO PIZZOLO

The writer of Black Mask's new, politically charged series *CalExit* tells all.

28 / P. CRAIG RUSSELL

Find out about the hotly-anticipated adaptation of Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*.

30 / ARVIND ETHAN DAVID

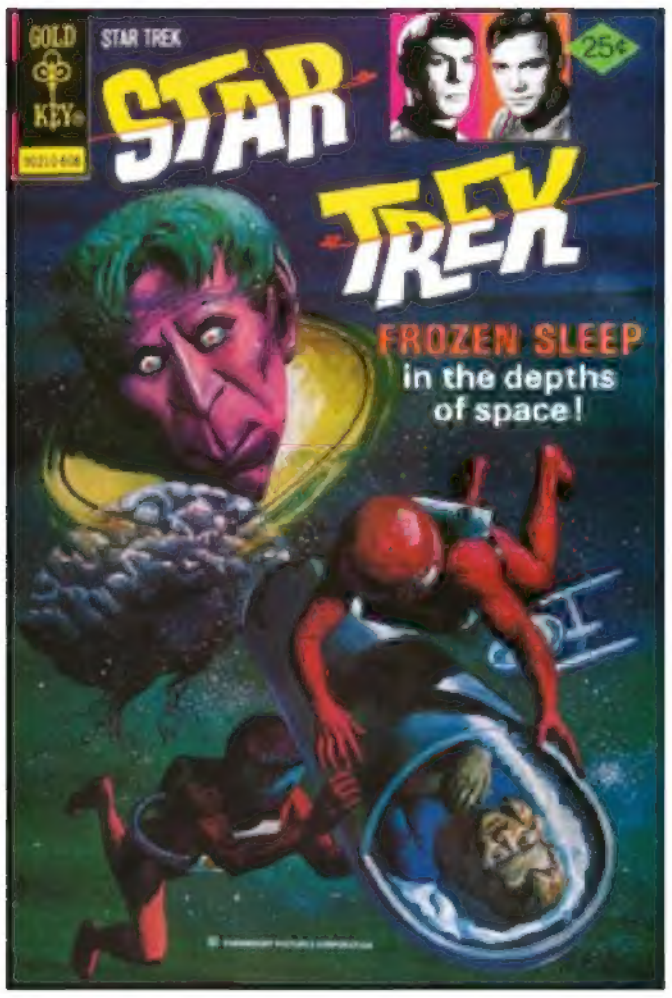
Chatting with the writer of *Dirk Gently* and *Darkness Visible*.

32 / JON SCHNEPP

Thrash metal band Slayer have a new comic (and why not). The series' writer lifts the lid.

FEATURES

34 / COVER STARS
Celebrating Silver Age Gold Key cover painter George Wilson



36 / THE BEST OF SPIDER-MAN
Revealed! The 25 milestone moments in the career of our friendly neighbourhood web-slinger.

44 / MILES AHEAD
Why Miles Morales is so much more than just "the black Spider-Man".

48 / A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN
The long and storied history of the Justice League of America.

54 / LOST TREASURES
Revisit the glories of Ezquerra and Ennis's classic *Just A Pilgrim*.

58 / BERNIE WRIGHTSON
A tribute to the late, great master of horror illustration.

62 / SWAMP THING
We dig deep and get to the roots of DC's era-defining muck monster.

70 / CRIMINAL MINDS
The creators of saucy, subversive *Sex Criminals* talk mental health, in-jokes and, er, brimping.

76 / BACK TO THE '80s
10 of the comics hearking back to the decade that taste forgot.

82 / UNSUNG HEROES
Flatting, lettering, editing... Discover the overlooked comics contributors.

88 / PULP FICTION
Josh Bayer talks All Time Comics, Fantagraphics' superhero universe.

94 / PAUL B. RAINEY
A chat with the idiosyncratic talent.

100 / WORLD OF COMICS
Meet South Korean manhwa master Hur Young-man.

130 / MY LIFE IN COMICS
Writer Tony Lee on the comics that made him.

REVIEWS

107 / Including reviews of the latest DC Rebirth and Marvel titles, *The Wild Storm, Kamandi Challenge, Warhammer 40K, Darkness Visible* and tons more.

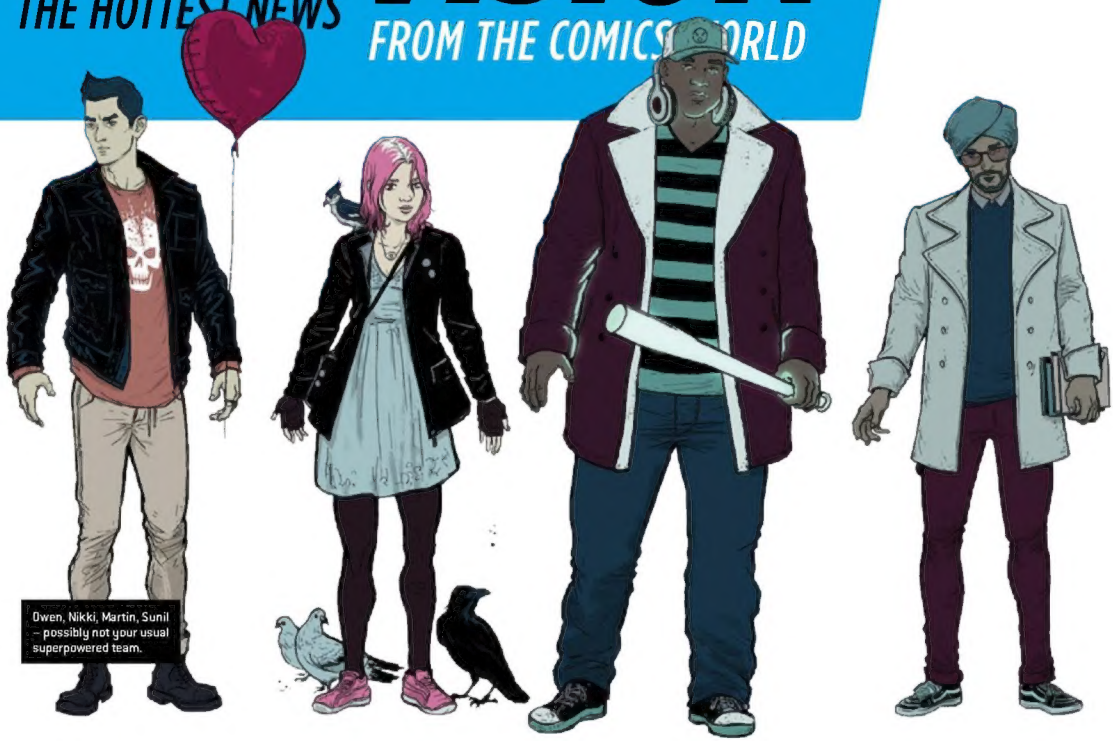
INDIE COMICS

122 / STATE OF INDEPENDENTS
The latest round-up of cool new indie comics worth seeking out.

124 / INDIE SPOTLIGHT
Three top UK studios profiled.

HEAT VISION

THE HOTTEST NEWS FROM THE COMICS WORLD



Owen, Nikki, Martin, Sunil – possibly not your usual superpowered team.

YOUNG GUNS

Arrival screenwriter **Eric Heisserer** reveals to **Stephen Jewell** how he is bringing *Secret Weapons* back for Valiant

***Secret Weapons* started out a team book in the 1990s starring heavy-hitters like Solar, X-O Manowar and the Geomancer.** Now, Valiant is reviving *Secret Weapons* in June in a new mini-series, with a new team leader, Livewire. The four-parter is being written by *Arrival* screenwriter Eric Heisserer, who first fell in love with Livewire, the technopath otherwise known as Amanda McKee, when he included her in his screenplay for Sony's upcoming big screen adaptations of Valiant properties *Harbinger* and *Bloodshot*.

"I'm really excited about it," says Heisserer, who studied both Livewire's earlier adventures and her more recent appearances in titles like *Unity* and *Harbinger*. "I've done a little of that work, and she's changed a little in the way that Josh Dysart worked with the character in the early *Harbinger* days has informed more than anything."

Livewire was mentored by Harbinger founder Toyo Harada, and Heisserer is impressed by how she has stuck to her guns even after his eventual betrayal. "I like the fact that her discipline and her moral compass have endured even when the person who taught her a lot of the principles and philosophies by which she approaches life then turned out to be corrupt and also to have made terrible mistakes," he says. "I find it really compelling that she can still hold on to her values and the virtues that she's learned, and that's why I find her to be such a heroic person."

The cover by series artist Raúl Allén. Three variant covers are also planned.

HARADA NEVER MENTIONED IT. I DON'T THINK HE'S EVER BEEN TO OKLAHOMA.
HISTORICALLY, "THE WILLOWS" WAS THE NAME OF A HOME FOR UNWED MOTHERS TO GIVE UP THEIR UNWANTED CHILDREN FOR ADOPTION.
HOW MANY PILOTS WERE STAYING HERE?
THE LEAH HARADA SEAL AND SUDDENLY MANY MORE HAVE BEEN THROUGH HERE.
I WAS HARADA'S LIEUTENANT. I CAN'T BELIEVE I'VE NEVER HEARD OF THIS PLACE BEFORE.
WHAT SECRET THIS HARADA KEPING?
DETECTING ROGUE TECH IN THIS ROOM.
HOLOGRAPHIC & PLAYBACK DRIVES.
I'M ACTIVATING
OH, NO.

Livewire taps into tech. Other characters have odder abilities (below).

"HER PRINCIPLES AND MORAL COMPASS HAVE ENDURED EVEN WHEN THE PERSON WHO TAUGHT HER A LOT OF THAT TURNED OUT TO BE CORRUPT"

Describing the team as "a rag-tag collection of kids," Heisserer reveals that the roster will also include Nikki Finch, "who can communicate with birds," and Owen Cho, a conjuror "who can make things materialise out of thin air, although he has no control of what he conjures." There's also Martin, "who can make any inanimate object phosphorescent, so he literally glows in the dark." Then "there's Sunil, who can turn his skin or anything he is in contact with into alabaster, marble or stone, as if he was The Thing. The disadvantage of that is that he can't move when he does that, so he's a total statue, meaning that whatever position he is in, he's stuck in it unless he deactivates it." Heisserer promises to introduce some other characters in later issues.

With their outsider status and offbeat abilities, the Weapons resemble Marvel's Merry Mutants. "There's absolutely a comparison there, and I draw from that," admits Heisserer. "But what they draw from as well is that situation when you're growing up and you're in your teenage years or even your childhood years, or if you have any physical disability or if there's any other part of your developing life that you're struggling with. It could also be a learning curve, or your teachers or parents tell you you're not going to make it, you're not going to fit in. Usually outcasts are people who are told by others that they're outcasts, because nobody does it willingly to themselves."

Although he initially penned quite detailed scripts, Heisserer has adopted a more flexible approach since striking up a rapport with Spanish artist Raúl Allén, who has previously drawn series like *Wrath of the Eternal Warrior* for Valiant. "Back when I wrote the first issue, I didn't know I was going to get Raúl," he says. "Since then I've been a lot looser with my panel descriptions. I don't want to restrain him too much. I'd rather he just let his imagination run away with him."

Secret Weapons #1 is published on 28 June.

THICKER THAN WATER

The crimson stuff is flowing in Rob Liefeld's new *Deadpool* graphic novel, *Bad Blood*

Guest-starring Cable, Domino, Shatterstar and Cain, *Deadpool: Bad Blood* is more like a team book featuring all of the popular characters that Rob Liefeld created for Marvel. Harking back to the Image Comics co-founder's formative days on titles like *New Mutants* and *X-Force*, the 112-page graphic novel introduces a new adversary, Thumper, who boasts an intriguing connection to the Merc with the Mouth's past.

"He has bad blood with Deadpool," says Liefeld. "The story starts with a flashback that takes you back to 1991, so you see an untold tale of how a situation unfolded with Deadpool, Cable and the X-Force team. Out of that, you'll then see Deadpool with Domino and Cain in the present day. There are a lot of secrets and mysteries to be revealed, as we're going all the way back to Deadpool's childhood."

Deadpool made his bow in 1991's *New Mutants* #98, and Liefeld has since then returned to his most popular creation on a regular basis. "I was 21 when I first came up with Deadpool, and we're now way past that," he says, acknowledging that his approach has inevitably been influenced by last year's big screen blockbuster.

"It's hard not to hear Ryan Reynolds' voice," he admits. "It's a bit like when Robert Downey Jr first portrayed Iron Man… But the shadow of the movie is a good thing to have over the book, and it was there the entire time that we were putting the book together. We've tried to give it a bit of heart, as I felt that the heart that was in the film was what people loved about it the most. That's why you rooted for him, whether he was zany, sinister or ruthless. We've tried to make it as funny as we possibly can, and I think that the action we portray is top notch."

While Liefeld has plotted, pencilled and inked the comic, he brought in Chad Bowers and Chris Sims as co-writers. "I've created the story and the storytelling, but I've passed the script on to those two guys as I think they handle dialogue and banter better than me," says Liefeld, who also recruited Bowers to pen the new *Youngblood* series.

"Chad is a child of the '90s, and he told me that he bought all those books when he was a teenager, and that *Youngblood* is one of his favourite comics," Liefeld continues. "He hasn't disappointed, as the story *Youngblood: Reborn* is my favourite approach to *Youngblood* in the last twenty years, and the artist, a newcomer called Jim Towe, is a wonderful storyteller and illustrator."

Deadpool: Bad Blood is published on 17 May.

Liefeld produced all the art on the new graphic novel, but worked with Chad Bowers and Chris Sims on the script.

> "WE'RE GOING BACK TO DEADPOOL'S CHILDHOOD"

DEAD AGAIN

Do you miss *Deadline*? Then you won't want to miss **Missed Deadline**, the new anthology reviving the spirit of the old

***Deadline* was a magazine that defined the independent British comics scenes in the late '80s and '90s.** Hewlett and Martin's Tank Girl debuted in its pages, and it launched the careers of many creators including Philip Bond and Nick Abadzis. Its editors, Brett Ewins and Steve Dillon, were major players in the industry. *Deadline* ended in 1995 but from 2017, *Missed Deadline* will take its place.

"The long-term goal was always to bring *Deadline* back for the modern generation, with a 50/50 split of new and old creators," its creative director Jessica Kemp tells *Comic Heroes*, "but for many years this just seemed to be impossible in terms of manpower and financial outlay, not to mention time.

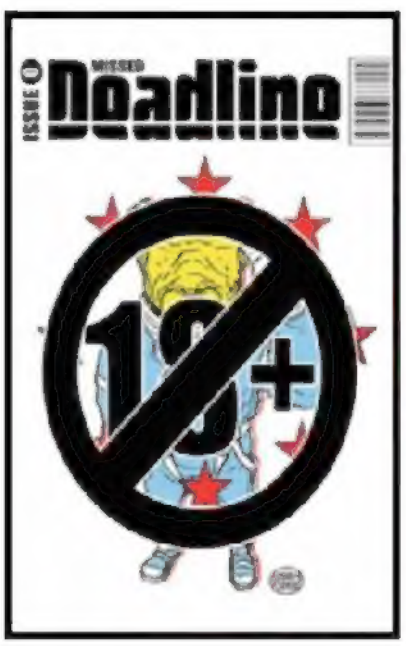
"We started *Missed Deadline* as a collective for several members of the group including, Damian James Schofield, Kerensa Creswell-Bryant and a few others to work as a collective at cons and for comics publishers over three years ago now," Kemp explains.

"We went on to work with David Lloyd on *Aces Weekly*, programmed the first comics stream for Nine Worlds and wrote and/or drew for *Spindle Magazine*, *SFX*, Bleeding Cool and others under the collective's name."

The motive for creating a new British comics anthology in this mould? "It's a genuine love for the original magazine and all its creators, many of whom inspired us all to work in comics and become writers/artist and now publishers. We all felt a genuine loss when *Deadline* disappeared from the shelves. When Brett Ewins passed we felt a need to preserve the good work that he did along with Steve Dillon and many, many others."

Above: Artwork by Jane Kane.

Below: Issue 0 cover (underlying Antman image by Shaky Kane) and issue 3 artwork by Lindsay Pickett.

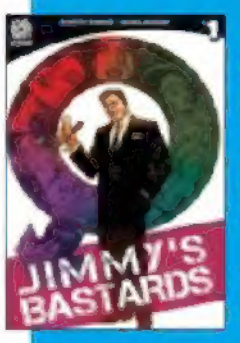


This is how they describe the revived magazine themselves: "We are by our own admission 'a magazine for those who just can't be arsed in the morning.' It will be full of the strips no one else was stupid enough to risk incurring legal proceedings by publishing and some frankly scandalous (if not libellous) gossip from the Slanda Panda. I can name those already featured on the covers we've released that include Shaky Kane, Jane Kane, Lindsay Pickett, Hal Laren, with a logo from Rian Hughes. We also have a cover featuring the face of Missed Deadline Coco Deville from Hal."

Missed Deadline will launch as a preview edition at ICE Brighton this June with further details to follow. missedeadline.blogspot.co.uk

IN THE FRAME

ANNOUNCEMENTS, INFO AND NEW STUFF WORTH A LOOK



SPY GAMES

Garth Ennis and Russ Braun are set to launch 007 parody *Jimmy's Bastards* in June, from Aftershock. The series follows a womanising super-spy whose romantic misadventures come back to haunt him.

JAY LYNCH 1945-2017

Underground comix creator Jay Lynch has passed away at the age of 72. He was best known for his work on *Bazooka Joe*, *Bijou Funnies*, *Nard 'n' Pat* and for drawing many of the cult *Garbage Pail Kids* trading cards.

LOST GIRLS FOUND

Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie's epic erotic comic *Lost Girls* (where Dorothy Gale, Wendy Darling and Alice from *Alice In Wonderland* have a *very* nice time together) is to get an expanded edition with 32 more pages of horny fairytale fun.

MYTH BUSTERS

Skybound and Image are set to release *Kill The Minotaur*, a blood-soaked mythological fantasy from the team of Chris Pasetto, Christian Cantamess, Lukas Ketner and Jean-Francois Beaulieu. The first issue is out on 14 June.

FOREVER YOUNG

Novelist **Joe Haldeman** and artist **Marvano** bring their vision of the future back from the past in *Forever War*

Joe Haldeman's 1974 novel *The Forever War* remains one of the best-known and best-loved science fiction novels of all time. Some 14 years after its original publication, Haldeman translated the story into a well-received comic series drawn by artist Marvano (real name Mark van Oppen). Out of print for decades, the series is being reissued by Titan in a monthly format.

The book tells the story of humanity's war against the alien Taurans – a conflict that lasts not years or decades, but *millennia*. A veteran of the Vietnam war, Haldeman brought his own experiences to his darkly funny novel, which also makes head-spinning use of time dilation: whenever the human soldiers are sent out to battle, huge passages of time have passed by the time they return to Earth, and they find that humanity has changed in often radical ways.

When *Comic Heroes* asks him how it feels to be revisiting the project today, Haldeman says "It's wonderful! Mark and I spent several good years on the project. Mark's fun to hang around with and a good excuse to go snorkelling and canoeing. If I twist his arm, he might have a glass of wine." As a self-confessed comics fan "since 1949", he says, Haldeman was thrilled to translate his story into the medium, describing the collaboration as straightforward but enjoyable. "I translated the novel into storyboard form. Then I refined that with the help of Marvano. Then we went back and forth a few times, further refining it."

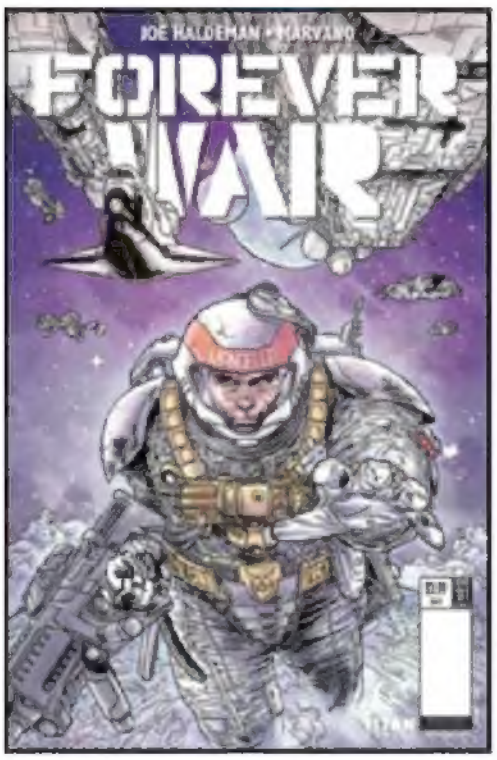
Above and below: Titan is serialising Haldeman and Marvano's comics adaptation from 1988 with striking multiple covers by modern-day artists and bonus material in each issue.

Marvano agrees that the collaboration was good. "We're both easy to work with – though I guess a few people wouldn't quite agree with that!"

So how does the artist view the book's enduring popularity? "On the one hand, as a story, it still functions wonderfully well, after a quarter century," he says. He's not uncritical of his younger self, however. "My mastery of the craft has improved quite a lot during this same period, so the imperfections are highly visible to me. But that's life. I'm still proud of the result."

Despite this, neither artist nor writer was tempted to fiddle with the book. "That way lies madness," says Haldeman. Likewise, he's not tempted to revisit the setting for sequels. "It would feel ghoulish. That story was over with the last book, and shouldn't be disinterred. I can write [new] things that are related in a metaphorical sense."

THIRTY SECONDS...
ALL RIGHT, BOWMONTCH, SET DOWN ON YOUR STOMACH AND LIE STILL.
EVERYBODY DOWN!
BOWMONTCH! NO!
SHE WAS IN FULL LEAP WHEN A FLASH BURST FROM THE CENTER...

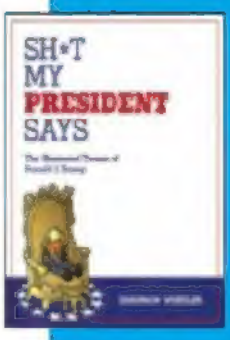


But why has the story of *The Forever War* endured for more than 40 years? That's simple, says Marvano. "It's a timeless story, sadly enough. Mankind doesn't seem to learn much from its past, I'm afraid. *The Forever War* will remain relevant for a long, long time to come..."

***The Forever War* #1 is out now from Titan Comics.**

IN THE FRAME

MORE WEE BITS AND BOBS THAT DIDN'T FIT ELSEWHERE



TRUMPED

Think the current US President's tweets are barking? *Mad* cartoonist Shannon Wheeler agrees. *Sh*t My President Says*, due in August from IDW, transforms Trump's tweets into incisive political cartoons.

OLIVER NOME 1978-2017

Just as we were going to press we heard the tragic news that *Wolverine* and *Flashpoint* artist Oliver Nome has passed away. *Comic Heroes* offers its condolences to all of this talented artist's friends and family.

RAISING HECK

Clive Barker has announced *Hellraiser: Anthology*. The 90-page hardcover book will include 11 stories from a host of creators including Nick Percival, Daniele Serra, Ben Meares and Barker himself. Expect blood, misery and a soupçon of S&M.

DEAD END?

Archie Comics are promising death and drama with "Over The Edge" – a three-issue arc set in the new Archie continuity that promises to be "the biggest event in Archie history". Mark Waid writes and Pete Woods draws the storyline, which kicks off in *Archie* #20.

FOREVER WAR © HALDEMAN, MARVANO & EDITIONS DUPUIS. COURTESY OF TITAN

TOTAL FILM

THE SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE

NEW ISSUE ON SALE NOW

www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/film

WILL EISNER CENTENARY EXHIBITIONS

Paul Gravett talks to **Denis Kitchen**, who is co-curating exhibitions in France and New York to celebrate the work of one of the true grandmasters of the comics form

Above: The weekly Spirit newspaper section ran from 1940 to 1952. Various ghost artists and collaborators played a major role, but that still leaves a huge body of groundbreaking work by Eisner himself

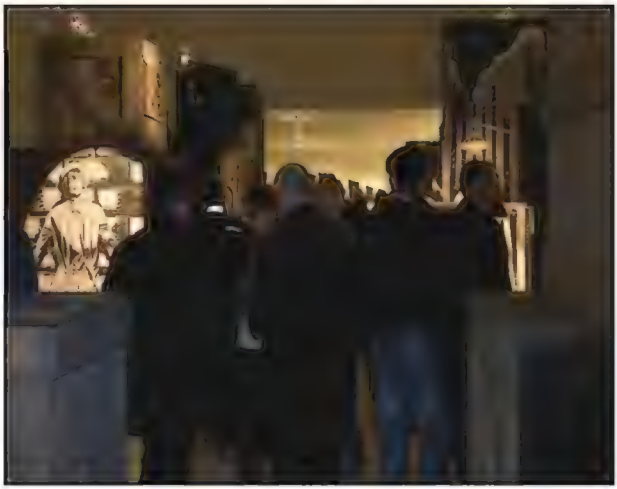
Right: Celebrating the innovative graphics and storytelling techniques Eisner developed in the course of The Spirit

American comics legend Will Eisner (1917-2005), creator of seminal masked hero The Spirit and pioneer of the graphic novel, would have been 100 this year. Paul Gravett talks to Denis Kitchen, Eisner's editor, agent, publisher, fellow artist and friend, about co-curating two major retrospectives, in France's capital of comics, Angoulême, and in the city of Eisner's birth, New York, with an impressive accompanying catalogue from Dark Horse.

Comic Heroes: What drove Eisner's lifelong dedication to comics?
Denis Kitchen: Will had a genuine love for the comics medium and a deep faith in its potential long before any of his contemporaries. He was a true innovator constantly pushing at the boundaries of storytelling, layout and technique.

CH: What were your goals with the Eisner exhibition in Angoulême?
DK: Co-curator Jean-Pierre Mercier and I wanted to, first, provide a full overview of Will's long career, with his earliest surviving painting, etchings and drawings from his teenage years, his Eisner & Iger Studio period, The Spirit, his army work, and then educational comics, leading up to graphic novels, the accomplishment he was most proud of. Within each period, we wanted to show the best examples and meaningful sequences.

CH: How does the Eisner show in New York differ?
DK: It was tough finding a "balance" so that each show contained excellent examples of Will's work. In the New York exhibit, co-curator John Lind and I made a deliberate decision to include more art and stories where Will depicts the city itself. Likewise, there was one story about a World War I battle in France that logically went



to Angoulême. I also included more pantomime pages for France to help non-English-speaking viewers. Aside from that, and the New York venue being a bit smaller than the Angoulême Museum, they're very similar in nature.

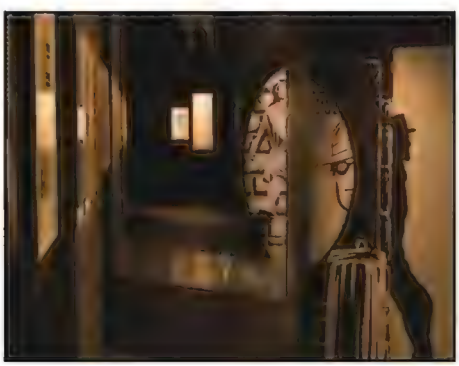
CH: What are the most significant and surprising items on display?
DK: The oldest surviving Spirit splash page, of The Spirit spanking Ellen Dolan, from 1940, is in France. It was the only art of his own that Will had hanging in his own home for decades. Both shows include extremely rare late 1930's "Espionage X" pages from *Smash Comics*, which show Eisner developing the unusual perspectives and feathering techniques that would become trademarks of his Spirit work from 1940 on. For some, his later work on *A Contract With God*, which revolutionised the comics industry, will be most significant, or the didactic work near the end of his career, like *Fagin The Jew* and *The Plot*.

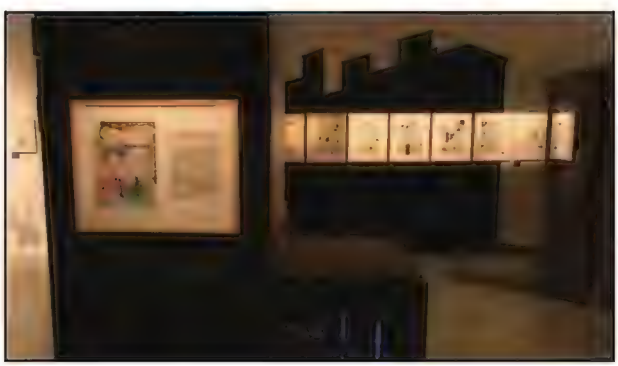
> **"WE SEE A KID WITH VISION AND TALENT TAKE THE FORM TO NEW LEVELS"**

CH: Eisner's oeuvre is a masterclass in sequential art – what are the most important lessons it can teach us?
DK: American comic books in the 1930s and 1940s were pretty lame. Even the most famous ones suffered from hackneyed art and predictable plots. With Eisner we see how an individual – a kid – with vision and talent could transform the aesthetics and storytelling and take the form to new levels, inspiring others from his own era and later to keep pace. Will would have been a legendary figure in comics for his work on The Spirit alone. But during World War II and later he developed educational comics for the army and private industry, an important field now taken for granted. And later still, in his 60s, he jumpstarted the modern graphic novel with *A Contract With God*. Comics are regarded today as a legitimate literary and artistic medium and Will Eisner, probably more than anyone else, is responsible for that.

This page: Visitors to the exhibition in Angoulême, titled "Will Eisner Genius of American Comics", take in artwork spanning Eisner's entire career, from the earliest surviving Spirit splash page to some of his last graphic novels.

The Eisner Centenary Exhibitions continue at the Musée de la Bande Dessinée, Angoulême, France, until 15 October, and The Society of Illustrators, New York, until 3 June.





PHOTOGRAPHS © MARC TOURN, FR

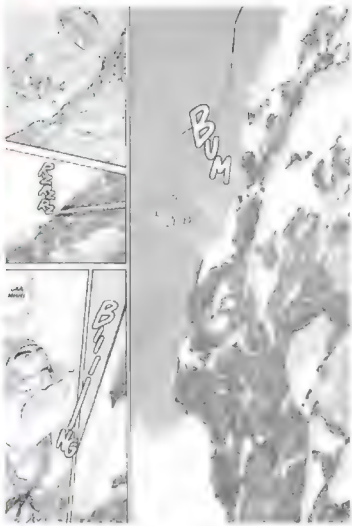
JIRO TANIGUCHI

1947–2017

Paul Gravett pays tribute to the late Japanese comics creator, whose vivid manga became even more renowned internationally, especially in France.

"It's while walking that I think," Jiro Taniguchi confided in the 2014 video of his wanderings through Venice, as he prepared a travel book for French fashion label Louis Vuitton. In many ways, Taniguchi came to resemble the character in his breakthrough 1992 solo manga *The Walking Man*, in which a man's private, meditative strolls help him to connect with his surroundings and fellow human beings and to recharge his ideas and his spirits. The intensity of Taniguchi's observation shines through in the scintillating cityscapes and natural >

The Summit Of The Gods won awards at the Angoulême festival in 2002 and 2005.
The Summit of the Gods
JIRO TANIGUCHI
1
FANFARE
PONENT MON



settings, present and past, delineated in all of his manga. Always defined and refined by his precise lines, with none of the distortion and speed often mis-associated as defining manga, his are the drawings of someone who has really looked, and who invites us also to look more closely and appreciatively.

Reading and drawing comics had obsessed Taniguchi since his childhood in Tottori in the south of Japan, where he was born in 1947 during the country's difficult post-war recovery. Pressured when he was aged 20 into working as a "salaryman" in a Kyoto textile business, he found that one year was enough to convince him to quit, and in 1969 he resolved to pursue his ambition to become a *mangaka* or comics author. Luckily, through a friend, he learned that Kyota Ishikawa, a successful mangaka in Tokyo, was in need of an extra assistant. Despite having no artistic training, Taniguchi showed enough natural talent to be taken on as his assistant and student.

Apprenticeship is one path to break into Japan's industry, the biggest in the world, but the challenge is then to get your own work spotted by publishers, often by entering their talent-spotting competitions. His partly autobiographical *A Zoo In Winter* recalls the eager Taniguchi's learning curve and struggle for recognition. In a baptism of fire, the green tyro has barely walked in the door before he is put to work erasing extraneous pencil lines and adding special effect lines to heighten the drama. When the pressure was on, the team worked non-stop over two or three days, catching only short naps. In return, Taniguchi was paid, and he and a colleague got to share an apartment. Little did he know that he would end up spending the next five years working in that studio.

FIRST STEPS

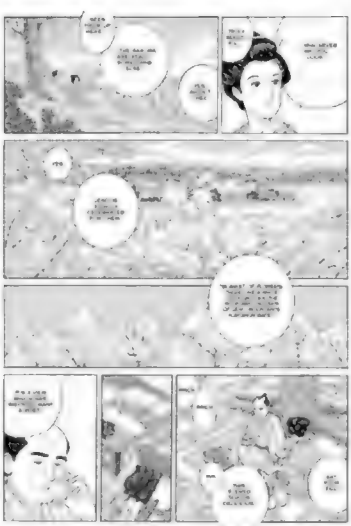
Taniguchi's debut came in *Weekly Young Comic* in 1971 on a story entitled "The Damned Room". He went on to draw some commissions for erotic manga magazines and to train further with Kazuo Kamimura, famed for illustrating *Lady Snowblood*. In that vein, Taniguchi's career eventually took off with drawing *seinen* action-based manga aimed at adult males, from historical samurai dramas to contemporary sports and crime stories. Depending on his workload, he himself would take on between two and four assistants. Two of his hard-boiled thrillers written by Natsuo Sekikawa were among the first of his manga translated into

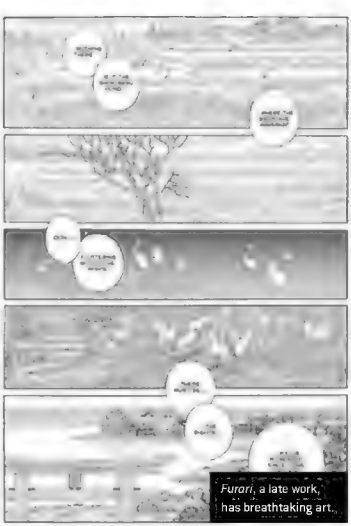
Botchan explores Japan's literary past in tranquil, contemplative style.

“ABOVE ALL I WANTED READERS TO SLOW DOWN HOW THEY READ COMICS”

English in 2001 as *Hotel Harbour View*. A 13-panel sequence of a lethal bullet's trajectory was hailed by Warren Ellis as a lesson in the power of manga's ruthless decompression, a lesson Ellis would apply to American comics.

Taniguchi's next collaboration with Sekikawa in 1987 marked a departure from such genre fare. In ten volumes of *The Times Of Botchan* they evoke an altogether more tranquil and cerebral past, recreating the lives and works of Japan's literary giants from the Meiji era. The mysterious disappearance in 1924 of English climber George Mallory on Mount Everest became the subject of another of Taniguchi's five-part series, *The Summit Of The Gods*, which he based on Baku Yumemakura's novel. In both projects, as in so much of his oeuvre, Taniguchi's meticulous, accurate draughtsmanship gives readers the conviction of “being there”, of seeing and almost breathing fully realised locales.

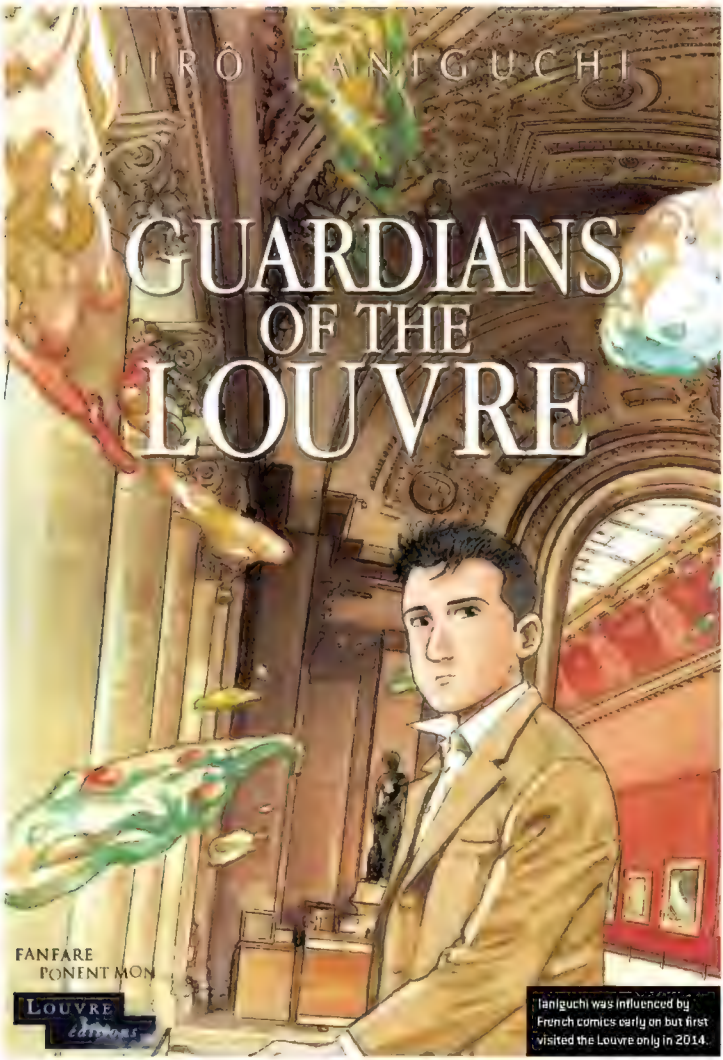




Furari, a late work, has breathtaking art.

Taniguchi was a long-time aficionado of European comics and in 1991, before any of his work was translated into French, he was picked as one of three mangaka invited to the Angoulême International Comics Festival in France, where Japan was guest country. This was his first ever trip outside his homeland and led to a meeting with one of his heroes, French genius Moebius. Their friendship brought them together in 1997 for a science fiction collaboration, *Icaro*, which got no further than its first volume.

Meanwhile, back home from France and re-charged, Taniguchi in 1992 was ready to try a change of direction and pace. The result was *The Walking Man*, a solo one-shot set in present-day Tokyo. As he told expert Nicolas Finet in 1994 in his first interview in France, “Above all I wanted to propose that readers slow >



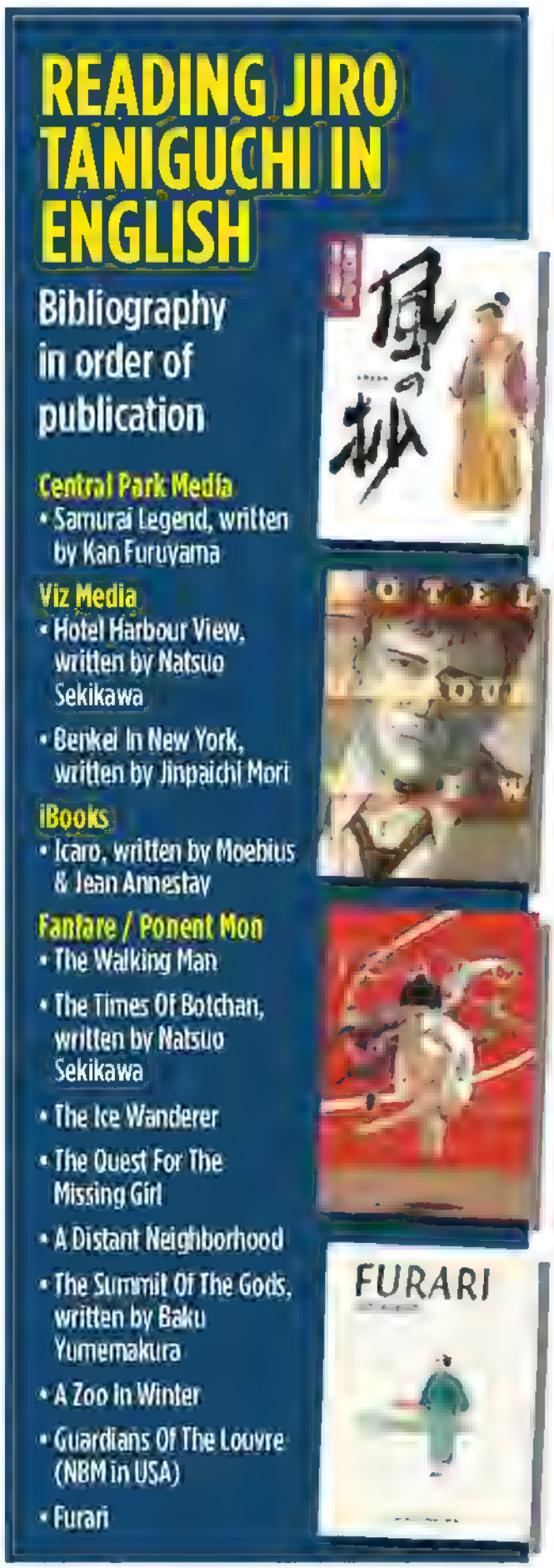
Taniguchi was influenced by French comics early on but first visited the Louvre only in 2014.

down how they read comics. In Japan, the way stories are constructed pushes you towards a kind of hyper-activity, a bulimia... With *The Walking Man*, I also wanted to create a very particular emotional register. Current Japanese comics are always trying to demonstrate and underline what is self-evident. My goal was to translate the hero's feelings through ambient effects, to suggest emotions, aesthetics and other things without having to explain them."

Understated, largely wordless, intimate, contemplative, influenced by the films of Yasujiro Ozu, these vignettes of a solitary walker finding Zen-like calm amid the bustle of the city were a far cry from typical mainstream manga, or almost any other comics worldwide. His peers in France and Italy were immediately struck by the book's quiet power. French writer and editor Benoît Peeters commented, "He knows how to express a feeling without underlining it, and that's something quite rare." Italian graphic novelist and publisher Igort said: "He is someone who related ingredients of everyday life never seen before in comics." Both men would become Taniguchi's friends and champions and help publish his work in French and Italian, while English-language editions continue to be released since 2004 by Fanfare/Ponent Mon.

INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM

In fact, Taniguchi would enjoy far greater acclaim in Europe, particularly France, than in Japan. This surprised him, as he told *Le Figaro*: "In Japan, people often


READING JIRO TANIGUCHI IN ENGLISH
Bibliography in order of publication
Central Park Media
• Samurai Legend, written by Kan Furuyama
Viz Media
• Hotel Harbour View, written by Natsuo Sekikawa
• Benkei In New York, written by Jinpaichi Mori
iBooks
• Icaro, written by Moebius & Jean Annestay
Fantare / Ponent Mon
• The Walking Man
• The Times Of Botchan, written by Natsuo Sekikawa
• The Ice Wanderer
• The Quest For The Missing Girl
• A Distant Neighborhood
• The Summit Of The Gods, written by Baku Yumemakura
• A Zoo In Winter
• Guardians Of The Louvre (NBM in USA)
• Furari
HOTEL
FURARI

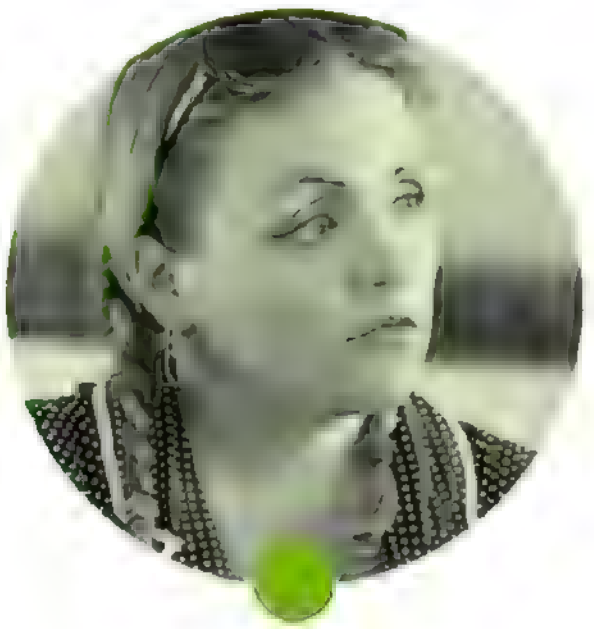
seem to find my stories too sober, too literary, whereas in France I sense a very deep attention to my work, notably to the text." His largest retrospective exhibition was held not in Tokyo but in Angoulême in 2015; President Mitterrand knighted him in 2011 as a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. In his native land, it has only been since 2012 that he started gaining some wider public prominence, for example once his Japanese cuisine manga *Solitary Gourmet* was adapted into a popular live action television drama, followed in 2016 by a live action movie version of *The Summit Of The Gods*.

One masterpiece deserving special mention is *A Distant Neighborhood*, about a 48 year old businessman finding himself back in the past as his 14 year old self, with all his adult memories intact. This is his chance to find out why one day, out of the blue, his father disappeared forever and to prevent it happening again. But the more answers he finds, the more uncertain he is that he can rewrite family history. Taniguchi crafts a subtle meditation on whether these two generations, father and son, are living the life they have chosen or the life chosen for them by others. This 1998 manga was adapted into a French film, with a cameo by the author, and a poignant, cleverly staged play.

Taniguchi died after a long illness on 11 February 2017, aged 69. His final completed work was the first of a projected three volume story in colour for French publisher Rue de Sèvres, *The Millennium Forest*. It will be published later this year.

When he was asked in 1994 by Nicolas Finet whether *The Walking Man* was him, Taniguchi replied, "He has more heart, he's better than me." This master of manga put plenty of heart into all of his deeply felt, emotionally varied oeuvre. His life was cut short, but his life's work lives on to enrich us all.

> **"HE KNOWS HOW TO EXPRESS A FEELING WITHOUT UNDERLINING IT, AND THAT'S QUITE RARE"**



ABOUT LEAH

Leah Moore is a writer of comics, prose and journalism, as well as the co-founder of the revolutionary *Electricomics*. She has written for *A Bronx Tale*, *Wild Girls*, *Tom Strong* and more. Follow her on Twitter at **@leahmoore**

She sells sanctuary

I'm writing this on International Women's Day 2017 and my feeds are filled with marches and demonstrations, with pussy hats and placards, with unsung women in science, industry, media, music, art, literature and activism. Dorothy Parker quotations, Maya Angelou poems, Yayoi Kusama installations and Patti Smith songs. It's a heady mix all together like this, a whole world of women being vocal and visible and passionate, all on the same day.

On 21 January, the day after Donald Trump's inauguration as President of the USA, millions of women across the globe marched to protest and over 30,000 copies of *Resist!* were distributed.[1]

That same day, Shelly Bond announced her return to comics with *Femme Magnifique*, a lavish anthology about inspirational women, featuring 50 stories from the best of the industry's female talent, and some of the best male talent too for good measure.[2]

Bond's departure from Vertigo was announced as part of a "restructuring" in April 2016, but very quickly snowballed into a twitterstorm when women who had worked in the DC offices suggested that there were more appropriate candidates for redundancy than Bond.

"We tiptoed around the rampant sexism and misogyny which was alienating women"

These storms are increasingly common as women in comics become more vocal about their experiences within the industry, about the depiction of women in comic art, about their proportional representation in merchandising and movie licensing, about the number of lines female characters get and the roles they are given. Women in comics, it seems, are not happy with teams that have one woman and one person of colour, they are not happy with female characters being someone to rescue or avenge, they are not happy with gravity-defying anatomy and sexualising costumes.

Panel talk

Thirteen years ago, every convention I attended I would sit on a Women In Comics panel. They would be cringeworthy affairs, where moderators would ask who our favourite characters were, or favourite collaborators to work with, and we might, if we were feeling daring, say that real female bodies don't look the same as comic art. We tiptoed around the rampant sexism and misogyny which was alienating women and girls from an entire medium. We did not touch on women's experiences at conventions as fans or professionals or cosplayers. We never ever talked about how some comic art portrays women in a way that is genuinely disturbing.

Instead we sat and talked about the greatest women in comics, safe conversational territory. Women like Jill Thompson, or Wendy Pini, Carla Speed McNeil, Lynn Varley and Roberta Gregory. Shelly Bond was always on that list, and so was Karen Berger.

On 17 February, Berger, award-winning editor of *Hellblazer, V For Vendetta, Fables* and *Sandman* and founder of the Vertigo line, announced her own creator-owned imprint with Dark Horse, called Berger Books.

When the news of Berger Books broke, social media was abuzz with what the woman that brought us Vertigo, and in doing so changed the comics industry forever, would do if she were not tied to the rigid corporate hierarchy and continuity gumbo of DC Comics. The fact the line is creator-owned shows, I think, that Berger doesn't just want to make great books, she wants her creators to flourish, and for that to nourish the whole industry.

Just over two weeks later, Shelly Bond announced Black Crown Comics, her own imprint at IDW. In an interview with *Hollywood Reporter*, she describes her planned titles as "comics with rock and roll swagger" which will mix industry veterans with newcomers, and which Bond says will "rip the patina off the human condition... These books have bite."[3]

I have had a smile on my face for weeks now. I cannot overstate the importance of these legendary female editors being set free into the comics industry, at the same time. IDW and Dark Horse must know how lucky they are.

The world is a scary place right now, but it was just as scary back when Vertigo got going, and it was the creativity sparked by those turbulent times that gave Vertigo its energy, bite, and freshness.

I know we are going to see great books that shift units, but also, in the foetid locker-room atmosphere of comics, Berger and Bond have just opened a window.

1 http://www.resistsubmission.com **2** https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/nifcolouredsign/femme-magnifique
3 http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/shelly-bond-her-deep-dark-demented-return-comics-983195

KA-PUNCH!

A COMIC BY MARC JACKSON

BLAAAARRRKKK!!
HOLY FISH-BASED BAD GUYS!
MY BEST-BUDDY DONALD AND ONE OF MY FAVOURITE FOODS, HAVE BEEN TURNED INTO MY WORST NIGHTMARE AND I'M POWERLESS TO STOP THEM!
HEY, LITTLE DUDE! WHAT'S ALL DA RUCKUSS?!
GENE, I NEED HELP!! DONALD HAS TURNED INTO A FISH TACO MONSTER!
HOLY MACKEREL!
POOF!
WELL, ACTUALLY, I THINK HE'S A CRAZED COD!
SHALL I JUST TURN HIM BACK, INTO A LITTLE DUDE?
OR... YOU CAN DO THAT?
YUP! NO PROBLEMO!
ACTUALLY, WHERE'S THE FUN IN THAT? GIVE ME MY POWERS BACK AND WE'LL EPIC BATTLE THE HECK OUT OF THIS SITUATION!
PRIMO CHOICE, LIL' DUDE! I'LL EVEN GIVE YOUR GRANDMA POWERS, SO YOU CAN FIGHT THAT RASCAL, TOGETHER!
WHUZZAT?
?
BLA-ZARP!!!
"LOOK ALIVE GRANDMA! PUNCH THAT TACO, RIGHT IN THE FISH NUTS!"
ZZZZ
ASLEEP AGAIN, GRANDMA?!! OK, LEAVE THIS TACO...
GLOIP!
TO ME!!
KA-PUNCH!
YOU LAID THAT TACO OUT LIKE A CHAMP, LIL' DUDE!!
I'LL TURN HIM BACK INTO YOUR BRO, NOW!
WOOOO!! FISH-A-LICIOUS!
ZARP!
BLERK!! I FEEL SO FUNKY. BUT AT LEAST I'M NOT A MUTANT TACO, ANYMORE!
ZOIP!
MAKES YOU CONTEMPLATE YOUR VERY EXISTENCE, WHILE YOU SIT THERE IN FISH GOOP EH, DONALD?
SOMEWHERE, IN ALL THIS, THERE'S A BIG LIFE LESSON...
LET'S GET YOU SOME CLOTHES AND TALK ABOUT IT OVER LUNCH, EH?
ALL THIS 'TACO ACTION' HAS GIVEN ME A MAD CRAVING FOR MEXICAN!

WWW.MARCMAKESCOMICS.CO.UK ©COPYRIGHT 2017 MARC JACKSON AND WEIRDO COMICS

KA-PUNCH! CREATOR

Comic Heroes: What can you tell us about the origins of Ka-punch?

Marc Jackson: He's my cartoony version of Kick Ass, but more all ages. He's also inspired by Adam West's Batman. Initially, like Kick Ass he was a kid in a costume, but then I hit upon the idea of Gene the Space Genie and the concept of what a kid might ask for if granted three wishes and it went from there.

CH: When did you start making comics?

MJ: I remember first drawing actual comics at around 10 or 11, but I've drawn since I was little. I came back to actually trying to get into comics seven years ago. I had a webcomic I created called *Man From Space*. I did a number of versions of this character, before I broke away from him and did lots of other characters and things really started to click.

CH: Who are your influences?

MJ: The Maestro, Sergio Aragonés when I saw *Groo* on a newsagent's shelf in my home town of Macclesfield when I was around 12, I was instantly hooked. Bill Watterson, who created my favourite comic strip, *Calvin and Hobbes*. His work will forever influence my style. Closer to home, Lew Stringer. His strips in Marvel UK comics really struck a chord with me and, years later, Lew put me in touch with *The Beano*, which led me to creating two characters for them. I'm forever grateful.

CH: Talk us through creating a strip...

MJ: The first thing I do is write a basic script. I break it up into panels and pages and write the dialogue. I add some notes for certain things that happen, but for the most part the initial elements like that stay in my head. I then start laying out the panels on the page; as I work digitally, I can drop the dialogue and text into the panels to get an idea for space. I draw all my characters on design sheets, copy and paste them into the panels they appear in, then take those basic characters and draw the panel based on what's happening.

I treat dialogue as equal parts finished and loose plot that evolves as I work. I'll add new jokes and new panels or split up panels to help the flow. Once I have the characters drawn up with the right pose and expression, I'll add any background elements needed. Then I'll adjust the lettering to make sure it's fitting, re sizing as need be and re writing inside balloons. I'll go into the text and increase the size of words for emphasis and randomly change case to give it a looser, more fun aspect. I'll then make any final tweaks.

CH: You work entirely digitally, right?

MJ: Yes. I'm also a graphic designer and when I came back to comics I just naturally did them on the computer. I still draw by hand and it's taken a while, but now my hand drawn style and computer drawn stuff are basically the same. I draw entirely in Adobe *Illustrator*, using the mouse and the pen and brush tools with pre set strokes I've created.

Goons parts 1 and 2 appear in *Aces Weekly* volumes 23 and 25.

CH: What else are you working on at the moment?

MJ: I'm working on new Goons of the Galaxy for *Aces Weekly*, which starts its third part in May. I have a new all ages comic, *Cat Stevens*, that I'm hoping will be published later this year, but that's all I can say at the moment. I'm also organising the second mini comic festival in Macclesfield called MACC POW!, which will be held on 1 July.

THE PENCIL ART OF
GEOF DARROW

DARROW IN THE RAW

From the high-impact *Hard Boiled* to his current series *Shaolin Cowboy*, Geof Darrow is renowned for his detailed *ligne claire* artwork and notorious for the explicit violence it so often depicts. Now we can see how tight and precise (and violent) his initial pencils are in a 128-page hardcover book, *Lead Poisoning: The Pencil Art of Geof Darrow*, out in July from Dark Horse.

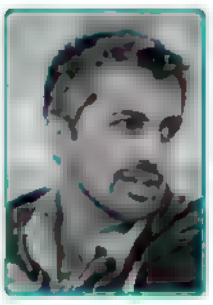
(C) RTESY DARK HORSE, GEOF DARROW

SHAPERS OF **WORLDS**

RAPID-FIRE Q&As WITH COMIC CREATORS

MATTEO PIZZOLO

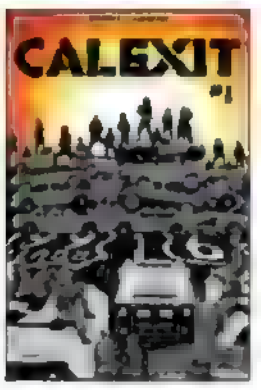
In Black Mask Studios' *CalExit*, California secedes from the United States. **Will Salmon** finds out more...

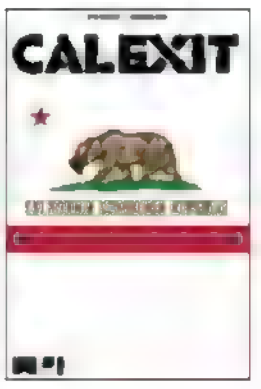


Comic Heroes: What was your starting point for *CalExit*? Was there a specific incident or news story that sparked the idea?

Matteo Pizzolo: The story in general is something I've been cooking up for a little while now – there's nothing new about the fact that our government has a problem with the way it treats immigrants. Whoever won the election, it'd still be a problem. The election did shift the context pretty dramatically, but I wouldn't say that's what really pushed this project to the level of aggression we're hitting.

The thing that really amped us up to turn this thing up to 11 was the Women's March and airport protests. I grew up in NY, where there is a lot of activism, and I've been part of activist groups in DC, Detroit, Seattle, Portland, the Bay Area... Generally LA is not a city that's perceived as being all that politically engaged, but over the 10 plus years I've lived here I've really been struck by the increasing levels of engagement. I personally saw it when Occupy reached LA and then it raised to another level with the Black Lives Matter protests, and then being at the Women's March with my family was just pretty incredible. And when the Women's March turnout was reported and California had arguably the highest numbers of any state, it really made me rethink what's possible. The following week the protests shut down both LAX and SFO airports... It's a big deal what's happening here. A lot of Californians feel frustrated that their votes don't matter as much as other states' because of the electoral college, and when you have an election like this one where California contributed so heavily to the popular vote, the level of anger is palpable.





CH: What do your protagonists want, and what is against them?

MP: Without giving too much away, Zora is already very radicalised. She is an immigrant on the run from deportation forces and she's a part of the resistance movement. Jamil is apolitical; he's a survivor who's a good person but basically looking out for himself. Their journey together will change them both.

CH: It sounds like we're rooting for California, but are there any downsides to it making its exit?

MP: Sure there are downsides. Secession isn't a slamdunk in practice. The fact is, we're all very interdependent. But there are also downsides to the US Government in the story escalating its authoritarian rule and trying to force people into doing things they find morally repugnant. War is generally pretty awful for both sides, but that doesn't mean you appease fascists. Ultimately, this story isn't about political intrigue between DC and Sacramento, though, it's about the characters

Above: UK readers might be surprised to discover there really is a Californian secession movement, but *CalExit* "isn't specifically about secession" per se

Left: Concept drawings of the protagonists

who are trying to make their way and do the right thing the best they can in an insane world.

CH: You're working with Amancay Nahuelpan again. What do you enjoy about your collaborations?

MP: Amancay is an incredible collaborator and I'm really thrilled to be working with him again. We've developed a really nice shorthand and he always takes my ideas and makes them better and adds his own brilliant ideas. We met when he contributed to the Occupy Comics project I put together years back, and we publish his series *Clandestino* about a revolution against a military dictator, so we're pretty like minded politically and neither of us is scared to push the boundaries, so that's really important in a collaboration. He's really fearless and his work has grit and dynamism that I find really rare. So I'm really blessed to get to work with him.

CH: Were you already working on the series before Trump won the presidency?

MP: Yes, but like I said it was recontextualised and has changed significantly based on current events. As the publisher at Black Mask, I can't tell you how many pitches I received during the primaries that started with "This starts in a world where Trump actually becomes President." Anyone who was working on political stories in 2016 really had to rethink those stories in the past few months.

Above: Pizzolo says *CalExit* is a "hopeful" book. "As depressing as the news can be, I'm really heartened by the millions of people coming together to try and make positive change and protect one another"

> It isn't about political intrigue but characters trying to make their way in an insane world

CH: How important is it for you that comics confront the political status quo?

MP: I think it's one of the most important things comics can do. There's a reason why books like *Maus*, *V For Vendetta*, *March*, *Persepolis*, *DMZ*, *The Invisibles* and so many more have become the modern classics. Comics, especially indie comics, are really unique because there's so few gatekeepers between the creators and the readers. It enables creators to tell really personal stories in a very intimate setting without a megacorporation dictating what is and isn't allowed, without a ratings board saying what is and isn't acceptable, without advertisers softening everything so they can sell soap. It's a real privilege that we have this artform and this marketplace that makes creators and readers and shop owners and collectors all so accessible to one another. There's no rules other than not to mistreat one another. Other than that, you can do or say anything you want in comics, and that's really special. Creators in most artforms don't have that. So in a lot of ways I think it's comics creators' responsibility to confront the status quo because we can.

CH: Is *CalExit* going to be a mini-series or ongoing book?

MP: We see this as an ongoing series of mini series with breaks in between. That will help us catch our breath so we don't run behind or have to rush the quality.

CH: What's it like working at Black Mask Studios?

MP: It's amazing. I'm one of the co founders, so my point of view is different from everybody else's, but it's a really unique family of creators here. I feel so blessed to get to support and read their books and also to be able to contribute creatively. Everyone here looks out for one another and cares about one another. I think it's just different than anyplace else and really special. And it's just a great time to be making comics.

P. CRAIG RUSSELL

The *Graveyard Book* artist tells **Stephen Jewell** about bringing Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* to comics.

Comic Heroes: You first collaborated with Neil Gaiman on *Sandman* #50 in 1992 and have adapted several of his novels into comics. What do you like most about his writing?

P. Craig Russell: It's damned good! For most of my career, I've been interested in doing adaptations, merely from the point of view of finding a project that had literary worth to begin with. I'm not a writer who generates my own original stories, so I really like working on that process of taking a novel or a play and turning it into a graphic narrative. That's where I work best, I think, in that transition between two different forms. I also like working with someone who is contemporary, as most of the work that I've done in the past has been based on stories by classic authors like Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling and Edgar Allan Poe. So it's been fun working with someone who is still at the point of their career when they're releasing a lot of work.

> At this point in my career, I don't want to be spending the next five years of my life drawing it

CH: How did you come to adapt *American Gods* for Dark Horse?

PCR: Neil asked me if I would like to do it, and my response was "sure". I'd already read the book when it first came out in 2001, and the reason I agreed to do it was that I would just be doing the script and the layouts. It's a huge book – the 10th Anniversary Edition, the version we're using, is around 650 pages long – and that means our graphic novel would have to be at least that long. At this point in my career, I don't want to be spending the next five years of my life drawing it, and Dark Horse don't want it to take that long either. So it made more sense to work with one primary artist, Scott Hampton, and we'll also be getting a series of other artists including Walt Simonson, Mark Buckingham, Colleen Doran and Glenn Fabry to do some short interlude sequences, so it has become more of an ensemble piece than a one man show. In doing it that way, we can produce it in three years instead of five or six.

Above: Glenn Fabry's cover for issue 1 is as mindblowing as anything he's ever done

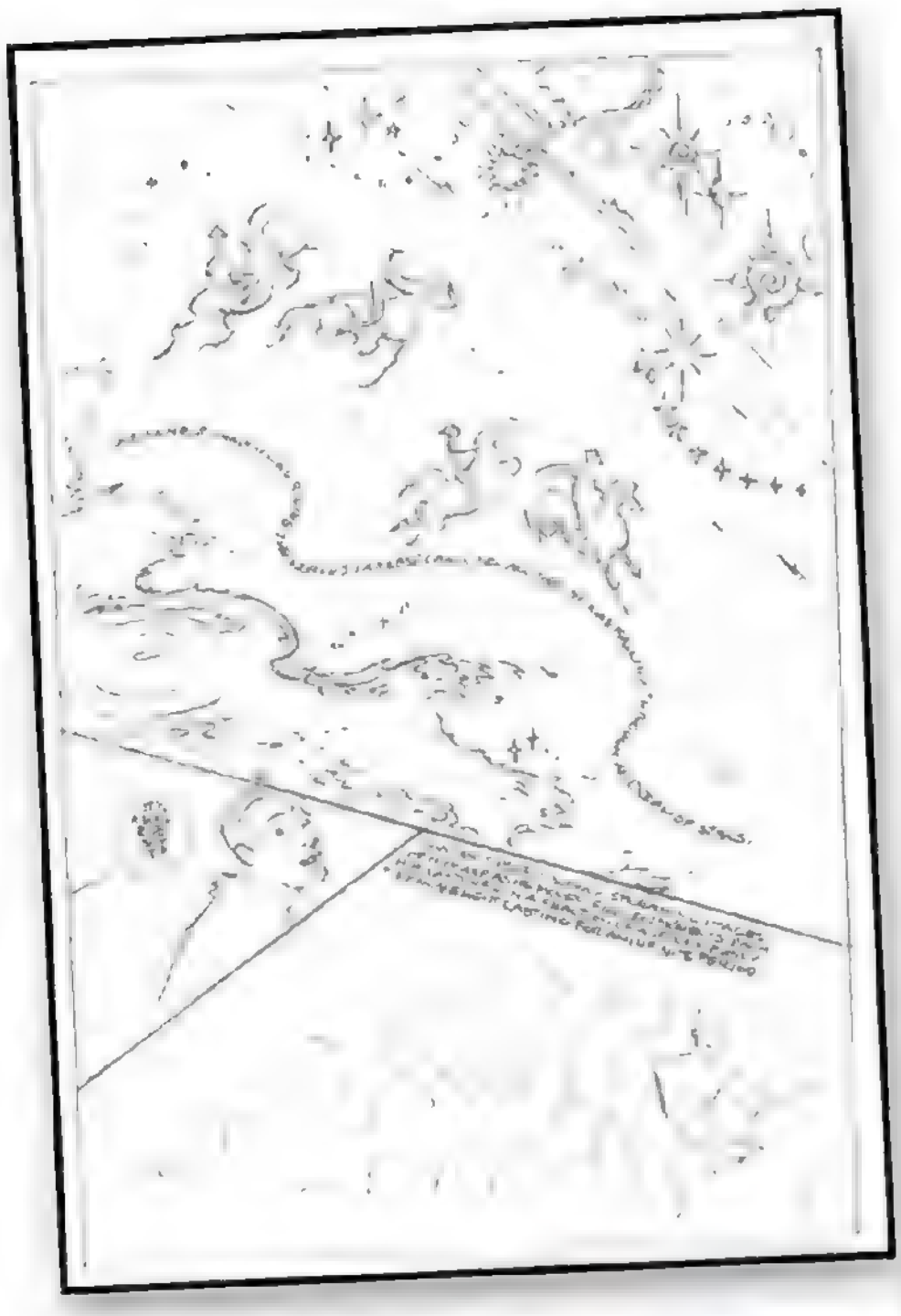
CH: You've previously worked with Scott Hampton on *The Graveyard Book*...

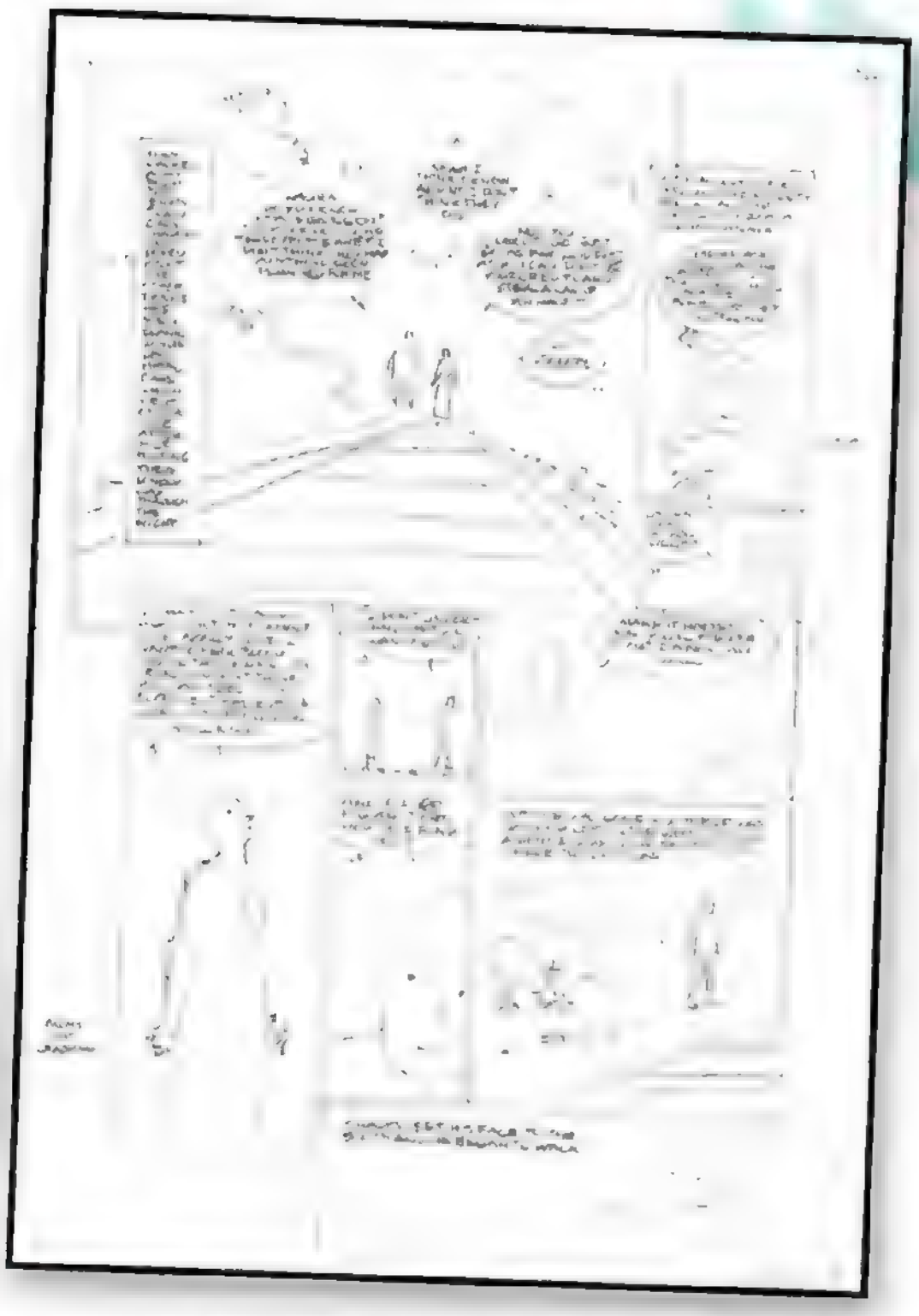
PCR: He did the longest chapter of *The Graveyard Book*, about 100 pages long, and he finished those 100 pages while other people were still working on their 30 to 40 pages. Not that speed is the only thing that counts – he also did it with such a high level of quality. He doesn't just do great fantasy: he is also really good at showcasing the everyday real world of motels, coffee shops, buses and all those things that go into drawing 21st century America.

CH: How does the partnership between you work?

PCR: I'm doing the scripts and the

IMAGES © 2011 NEIL GAIMAN. ALL ART © P. CRAIG RUSSELL





layouts, which means I sketch out the whole page and work out the lettering design. I do rough breakdowns, which are almost like storyboards with close ups, long shots and indications of body language and composition. It's sort of like what Harvey Kurtzman used to do at EC Comics back in the '50s – I provide a blueprint for the artist, who then does the finished artwork.

Above: Russell is taking on script and layout duties on the entire series, which means he begins with page design and storytelling breakdowns like these

CH Are you also liaising closely with Neil?

PCR: He's available whenever I have a question about the text one of the big challenges is that it essentially comes down to one page of art for every page of prose. That entails a great deal of configuring and shaving away, and I'm always worried that something I'm cutting out might be a set up for something else later on. If that is the case, I'll send Neil an email or a text and he'll usually get back to me within a few hours. Other than that, he just leaves me to it.

CH: The series will finally span 27 issues in three arcs corresponding to the three parts of the novel...

PCR: It's pretty much worked out that each chapter gets its own issue, but that's not always the case. There are eight chapters in the first part of the novel but our first arc, "Shadow", is nine issues long, so there is one point where I have had to make an issue break before there is a chapter break. That's one of the unique challenges of this project, that it's being serialised as opposed to *The Graveyard Book* or *Coraline*, which I also did, which came out as whole volumes. So we have this sort of artificial construct where every 23 pages it needs to be rounded off, so that it feels like a complete piece unto itself.

CH The television series of *American Gods* will be released shortly after the comic. Will there any kind of synergy between the different versions?

PCR: Absolutely not! My editor, Daniel Chabon, sent me a link to a preview, but I won't look at it. The same thing happened with *Coraline*, when they were doing an animated film of it at the same time as I was doing the graphic novel. I don't want any cross pollination between them. If we both arrive at the same solution for a storytelling problem independently of each other then that's fine. But if I see them solve that problem first, I would feel like I'm copying somebody else's work. But I can't wait to watch the TV show once I finish my part of the adaptation, although it will be a while longer before all the artwork is done. I'll happily binge watch it then.

ARVIND ETHAN DAVID

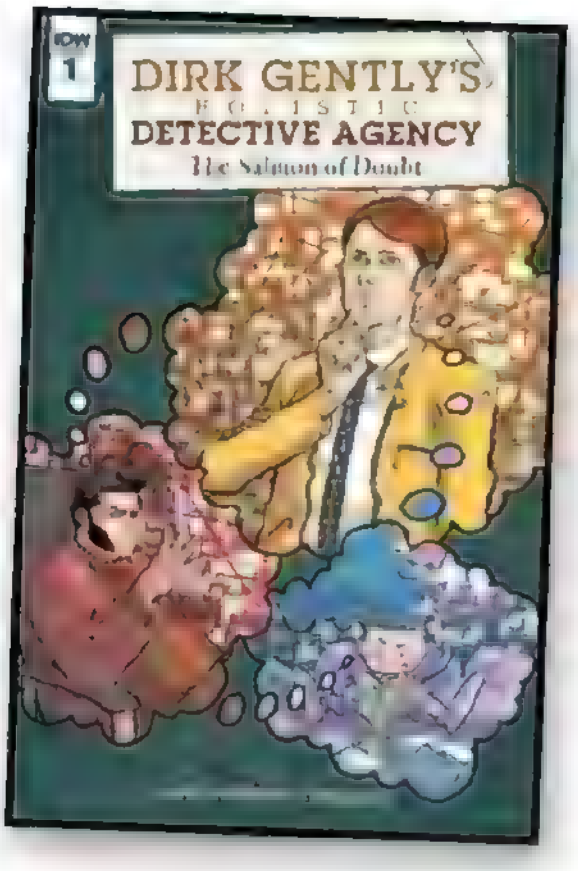
The Executive Producer of *Dirk Gently* tells **Stephen Jewell** about bringing Douglas Adams' Holistic Detective to comics...

Comic Heroes: You and Dirk Gently go back a long way...

Arvind Ethan David: We certainly do! I adapted Douglas Adams' original novel *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* as my school play when I was 16. I played Dirk himself and it was a transformative moment for me, as it gave me street cred and made me cool. It also told me that I love theatre. I did it again at college as an undergraduate, and this time something completely amazing happened as Douglas Adams came to see it. He liked it, and seemed to like me, and told me to keep doing it. That was how my life started, so to come back to it 20 years later and to bring *Dirk Gently* to a global audience is a very special privilege.

Right: The latest Dirk Gently title from IDW is written by Arvind Ethan David and illustrated by Ilias Kyriazis.

Below: Things in Dirk's world (and his cat's) get decidedly weird...



CH: IDW have so far released three *Dirk Gently* mini-series. How exactly do these relate to the television series?

AED: One of the fun things about being trusted with the whole property is that we get to be involved with it all. Very often with these things, the comic is a licensing deal and an afterthought, and somebody else will write it. Here, it's very cohesive, as Max Landis writes the TV show, which I executive produce, and I also write the comic. Anything we do in either place, we talk about. It's not that everything is slavishly consistent, but there is a master plan at work. The comic bridges the gap between the final Dirk Gently novel and the start of the TV show, and it harmonises these two universes and makes them one. So if you're a fan of the original books, and you read the comic and watch the TV show, they'll all fit together.

CH: The current comic series takes its name from Douglas Adams' final, unfinished Dirk Gently novel, *The Salmon of Doubt*...

> The comic bridges the gap between the final Dirk Gently novel and the start of the TV show. They'll all fit together

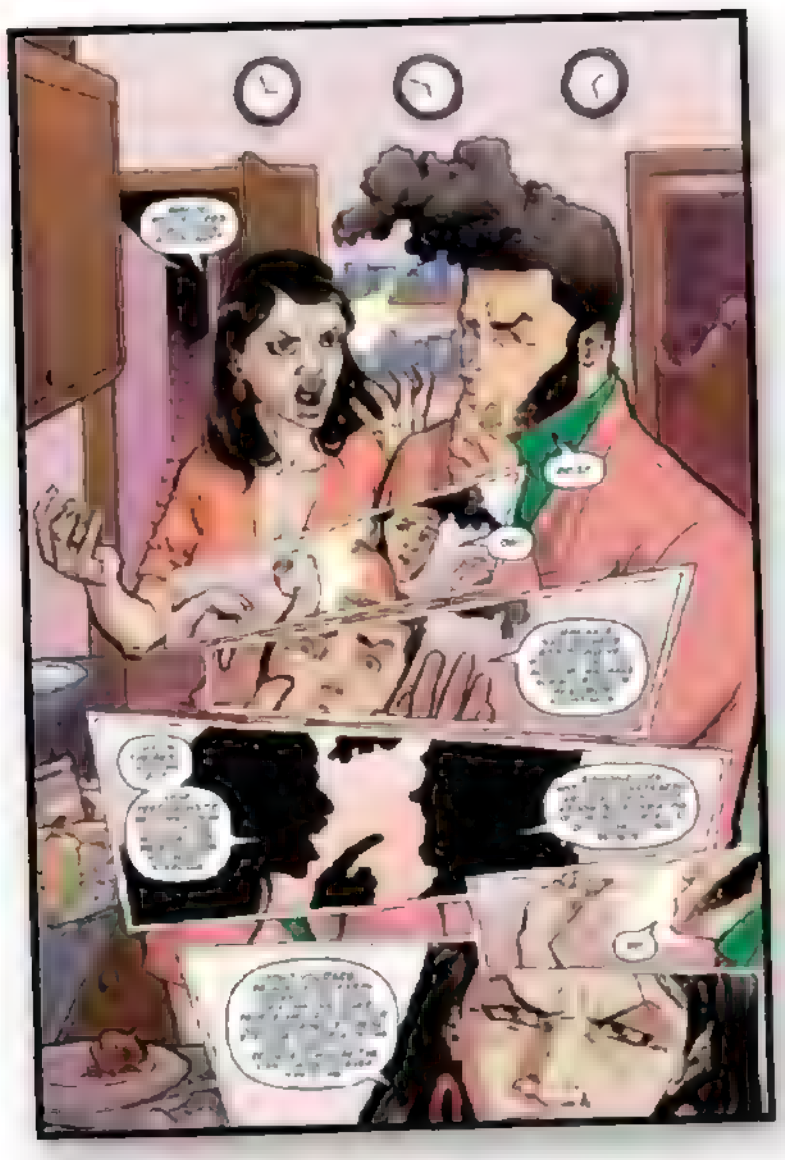
AED: It features the Dirk that you know from the books, the slightly overweight, crazy haired Dirk Gently. He's been having nightmares about a childhood that he swears he didn't actually have. It's as if someone has given him these memories, and if you've watched the TV show, some of those memories will seem familiar. So Dirk is going on an investigation in the comics to figure out where the other memories come from, and in doing so he comes across Professor Reg Chronotis, who is a retired time travelling Time Lord from the first Dirk Gently novel. They then go on an adventure, which will take them squarely into the events of the TV show.

CH: You're also co-writing *Darkness Visible*, a new ongoing IDW series, with Mike Carey. How did that come about?

AED: You'll begin to sense that there's a theme in my life, which is that I seek out my heroes! I've been a fan of Mike Carey really from the start of his Vertigo series *Lucifer*, which I read for years, issue by issue, as it was coming out. I was living in America at the time, and would buy them from a comic shop in New Haven, Connecticut, and just devour them. So I didn't realise that he was British until I was at a screening in London, and a friend gave me his first Felix Castor novel, *The Devil You Know*. It was dedicated to a woman I know called Meg Davis and when I asked her why that was, she told me that it was because she was his agent! I was like, "Can Mike and I have breakfast tomorrow?" So we met, and started collaborating on a movie that never happened. By that point we were friends, and since we had a story we loved, we decided to do it as a comic.

CH: Like the Felix Castor books and Paul Cornell's *London Falling* novels, *Darkness Visible* is an urban fantasy that explores London's supernatural past...

AED: It's also a bit like John Constantine as well. But while it starts off in that kind of world, where we take it is somewhere very different. We're telling a story that has a big historical backdrop, and it's also a political thriller and moral fable that moves from the personal to the level of the nation state, and back again in a way that maybe some of those other stories don't. It's in that noir horror, demonic tradition that Mike and I both enjoy very much. He's obviously worked in it extensively, and I'm very happy to be contributing something original to that space.



Above: *Darkness Visible*, illustrated by Brendan Cahill, is set in a world where demons live alongside humans

Left: Dirk has "a troubled relationship with the laws of causality"... and with relationships generally, for that matter.

CH: It also takes place in a very recognisable London...

AED: London is one of the most diverse cities in the world, if not *the* most diverse. We thought we'd widen that and take it further by saying "What about, as well as all those races, nationalities, languages and creeds, what if there were also these extra species and mystical planes?" It's set in a reality where demons came out of hiding during the Second World War and did a deal with Winston Churchill and the Allied Powers, where they would help them defeat the Nazis in return for free passage into our world. I think it's a really important time to be writing and talking about this, because diversity and openness is under threat around the world with what's happened in the UK with Brexit and in America with Trump. So it's a time for those of us with a voice to celebrate the immigrant and diversity, and to draw attention to the dangers of demonising others. CH

IMAGES OF DARKNESS VISIBLE © 2016 COMPLETELY UNEXPECTED PRODUCTIONS

JON SCHNEPP

The director of *Metalocalypse* and *The Death Of "Superman Lives": What Happened?* talks to **Claire Lim** about his latest project, returning to the world of comics for Dark Horse's *Slayer: Repentless*

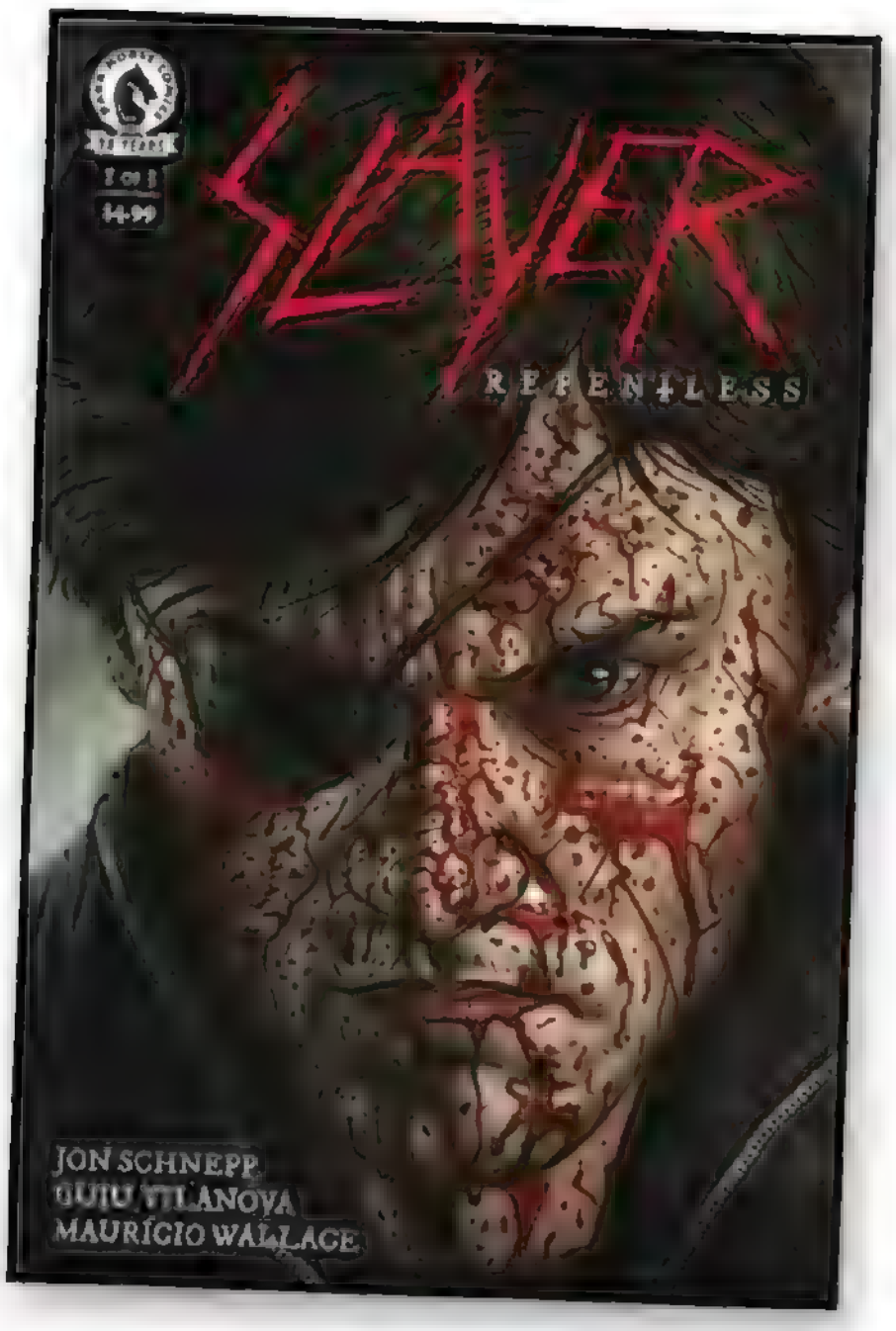
Comic Heroes: Slayer is a metal band, so what is *Slayer: Repentless* all about?
Jon Schnepp: It's about hatred and injustice and revenge, a deadly bloody road trip of horror, where a family is literally torn apart by stupidity, jealousy and love. I wanted to show how two brothers can be torn apart completely by different ways of thought and how that kind of pure hatred brings nothing but death and destruction.

CH: How closely did you work with the band on the story, if at all?
JS: They were pretty hands off I spoke with both Dark Horse editors as well as Nuclear Blast [Slayer's record label] and I talked to the band about the storyline and they approved everything and just let me run with it. They really let me tell the story I wanted to tell.

CH: When were you first approached to work on the comic?
JS: I was approached a few months into 2016 by Chris Warner, one of the editors over at Dark Horse. I'd worked with him on the *Metalocalypse* comic book series. He remembered a bunch of really horrifying storylines that I had told him that we never fit into *Metalocalypse*, so he knew I had a dark and twisted mind. So, when the comic book opportunity to write *Slayer* came up, he instantly thought of me.

CH: How much of the band's *Repentless* videos influenced the way in which you told the story?
JS: I was influenced by BJ McConnell's three music videos, which he wrote and directed for Slayer. I took the storyline that was established in the videos, using the character with the eye patch that I named Wyatt, and brought in a brother who he grew up with in Chicago: their parents were murdered and they were both raised by their neo Nazi uncle. I created an entire backstory establishing his relationship with his girlfriend,

> In comics, you literally have almost no people telling you what you can't do



Above: The three-part series features covers by Glenn Fabry evoking some of his memorable Vertigo work.

Angel, who dies. I wanted to show the difference between his hatred-filled upbringing and Angel's family, which he grew to know through his love for her.

CH: The comic is as abrasive as the music and the videos. As a director yourself, do you think it's easier to tell the stories you want to tell without restriction on the page as opposed to on-screen?
JS: With comic books you have a limitless budget as well as an open palette to tell whatever kind of story you feel is necessary to tell, especially when you're writing specifically for adults. I knew I wanted to incorporate Slayer's music and lyrics and infuse that into the storyline as well as take a lot of the feelings and emotions that come from listening to 30 years' worth of Slayer and bring that to life through certain

characters. Also, in comics, you literally have almost no people telling you what you can't do – I was given complete creative control in writing this comic book and bringing the story to life, which is a lot different than working in the medium of television or film, where you're weighing in a lot of decisions with writers and other producers.

CH: You explore a lot of touchy topics such as racism and extreme violence. How important was this for you to do? Are there enough comics creators, filmmakers and TV shows doing the same?

JS: I think it's very important to express your opinion in elevated situations such as graphic novels and comic books. I wanted to show the different worlds seen through these different characters as well as highlight the horror of pure hatred and the freedom of pure love Wyatt and many of the characters live between these two worlds. The ability to showcase horrific violence and disturbing scenarios is only one of the tools which add deeper layers, by using comic books as a metaphor to tell a story that is steeped in our own history of abuse, racism and aggressive hatred of each other for being different.

CH: Are there any other bands you'd like to collaborate with in this way in future?

JS: I would love to write comic books and/or graphic novels for Amon Amarth, Mastodon and Behemoth. Coming up with visuals as I did for the band Deathlok as well as doing music videos for bands like Exitus and Pilgrim, I found it very exciting to be able to tell stories visually the good old fashioned way. By writing comic books I'm able to add dialogue and deeper messages baked into those visuals, and that's what I look forward to delivering more of in the future.

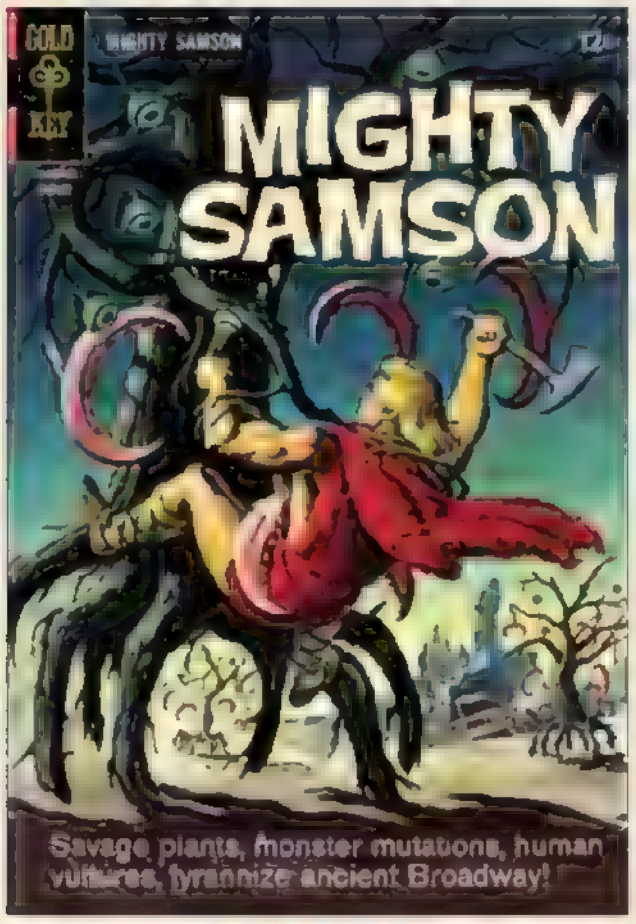
HEY, WHO PARKED THOSE RUSTY PIECES OF JUNK OUT FRONT?
YOUR MOM DID. SHE NEEDED THE WORK.
APPARENTLY HER DEADBEAT SON WAS IN JAIL.
FOR KIDDIE PORN, I BELIEVE.

Above: Series artist Guiu Vilanova captures the thrash metal band, and the story is based on their brutal *Repentless* videos.

CH: Do you have any plans to dip back into comics in future?

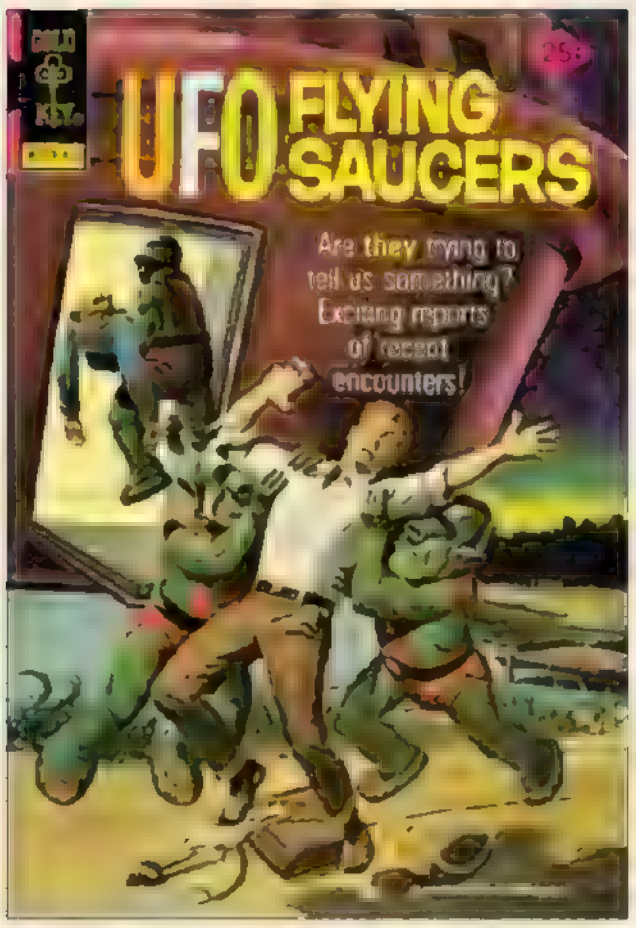
JS: I do. Comic books are one of the biggest and most important parts of my life. I absolutely love reading comic books, buying comic books and now writing comic books. I have two competing science fiction and horror comic books that I'm writing right now and plan on getting some artists together and either self publishing them by raising money through crowd funding and/or going to some independent comic book publishers to make these a reality. I also want to take a crack at writing the Batman, as well as one of my favourite cosmic teams, the Fantastic Four. I have barely cracked the surface of my future writing ambitions, so get ready, here comes the rocket!

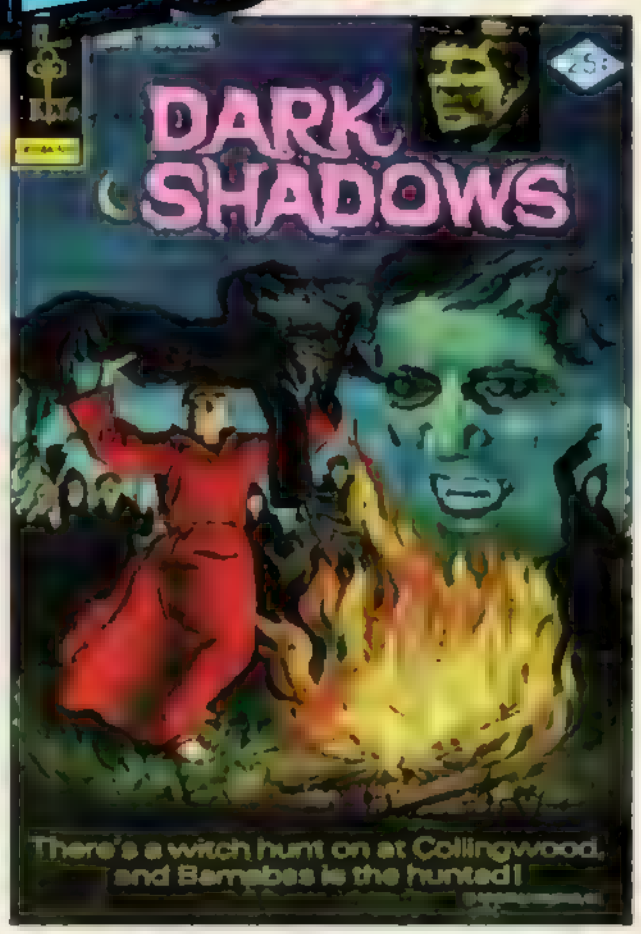
SLAYER: REPENTLESS TM & © SLAYER IMAGES (OR ITS SY OF DARK HORSE

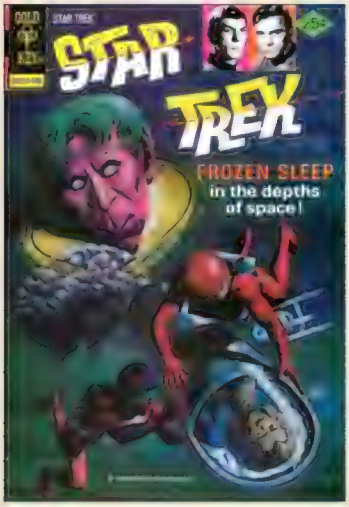


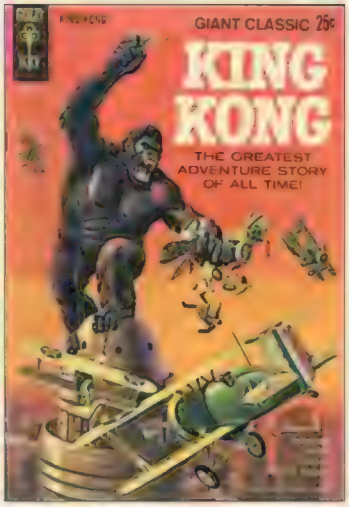
Cover Stars

GEORGE WILSON







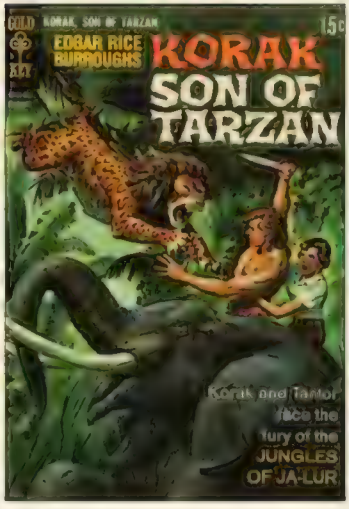


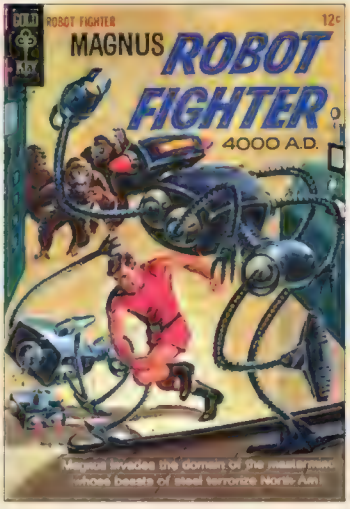
Among 1960s and '70s comics, Gold Keys were *different* – they had rectangular word balloons, no panel borders and, most strikingly of all, typically painted covers. Most of these watercolour and acrylic masterpieces were painted by the astonishingly prolific George Wilson.

Not to be confused with '30s pulp cover artist George H. Wilson, this George Wilson painted covers for paperbacks from the likes of Harlequin, Avon and Dell, then covers for comics by Dell, Classics Illustrated and, of course, Gold Key after it split from Dell in 1962.

> "HIS VIBRANT ART BROUGHT EVEN THE MOST BIZARRE CREATURES TO LIFE"

Unfailingly vibrant, eye-catching and exciting, Wilson's art brought even the most bizarre creatures to life and made characters such as Turok, Korak and the Phantom leap off the page. His talent for capturing likenesses played no small part in the success and longevity of Gold Key's mainstay licensed TV spin-off titles.





Face it, tiger... you just hit the jackpot!

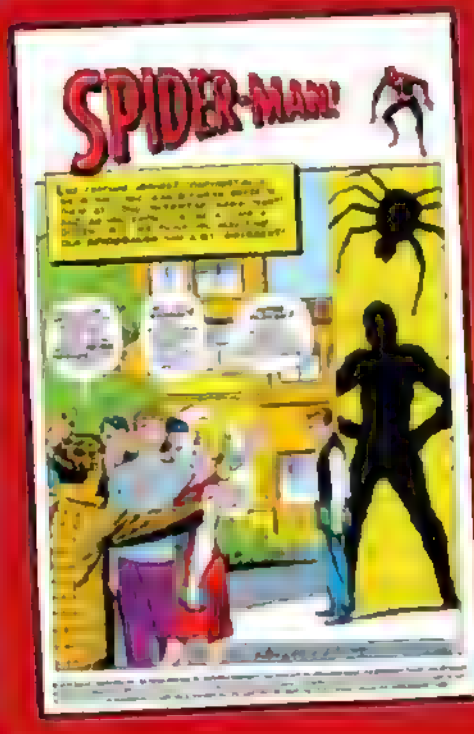
THE BEST OF SPIDER-MAN

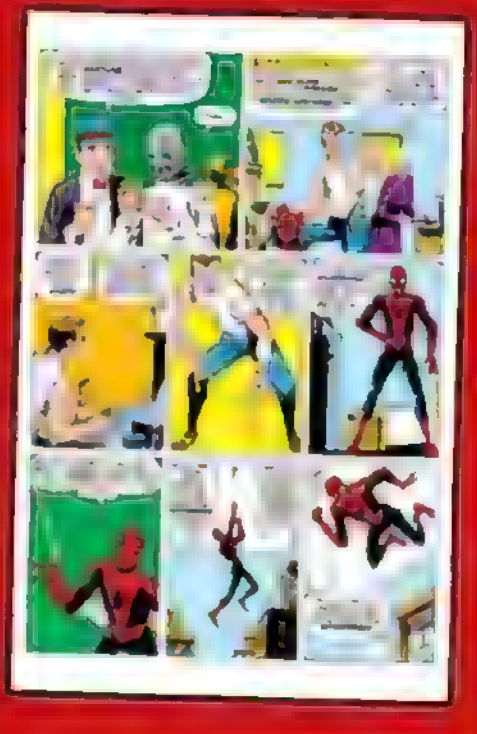
Hold tight and face front as **David Barnett** goes web-swinging through Spider-history to pick out 25 milestone moments

With 55 years of Spider-Man history being celebrated this year, there have been a multitude of stories, told across many titles, documenting the life, loves and battles of everyone's favourite Friendly Neighbourhood Wall-Crawler. Spidey's been married, killed and body-swapped, changed costumes, swung through the streets and been to the stars. And always – well, mostly – with a joke and a bit of banter. Here, in chronological order, are the 25 finest moments from Peter Parker's history.

AMAZING FANTASY #15

Spider-Man swung into action for the very first time in August 1962 at the hands of writer/editor Stan Lee and legendary artist Steve Ditko. The comic book was, of course, *Amazing Fantasy* #15, the final issue of what had been an anthology series featuring monster stories. The Marvel Age had already begun with the Fantastic Four and the Hulk, but the cover of that comic, with Spider-Man swinging through the New York skyline, a terrified crook under his arm, is rightly one of the most iconic in comics history. Peter Parker, the teenage wallflower bitten by a radioactive spider... This is where it all began.

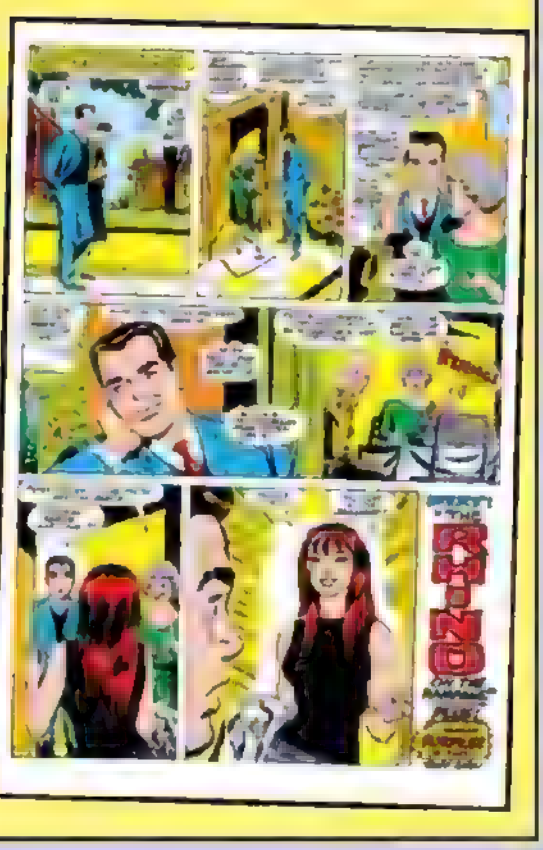




AMAZING FANTASY
12¢
15 AUG.
THOUGH THE WORLD MAY MOCK PETER PARKER, THE TIMID TEEN-AGER...
SPIDER MAN
...IT WILL SOON MARVEL AT THE AWESOME MIGHT OF... SPIDER-MAN!
ALSO IN THIS ISSUE
AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO YOU, FROM THE EDITOR--ABOUT THE NEW AMAZING!

SPIDER-MAN #42

If that first cover is iconic, then so must be the final panel of *Amazing Spider-Man* #42 in 1966, where a goggle-eyed Peter Parker (and the reader) claps eyes for the first time on the too-cool-for-school redhead who says "Face it, tiger... You just hit the jackpot!" Peter had been avoiding her for months because his Aunt May had been trying to set them up with each other, and the big reveal of Mary Jane as a classic '60s It girl sent him into a tailspin. MJ eventually became his on-off leading lady, after platinum blonde Gwen Stacy (more about her later).



AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #50

Barely five years into the job, Peter Parker was ready to quit! Spurred on by fiery newspaper editor J. Jonah Jameson, everyone seemed to hate Spidey. Crime-fighting was taking its toll on his life as Peter, and he was worried that his enemies would learn his real identity and get at his loved ones. In a scene replicated in the Tobey Maguire movies, after much soul-searching about his new life, Peter stuffs his red-and-blue duds into a back-alley dustbin in the story "Spider-Man No More!" Thankfully, he came round...

IMAGES © MARVEL COMICS 2012. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #100

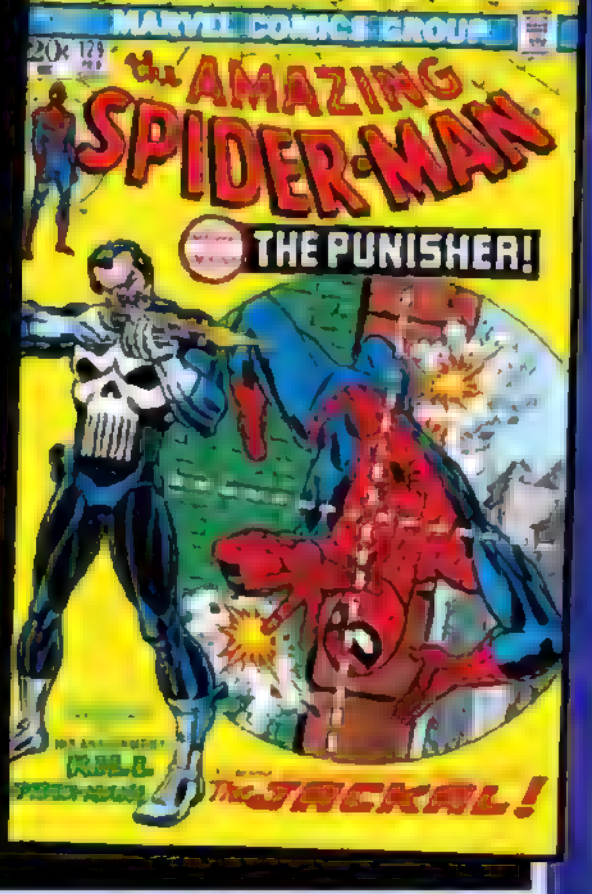
At the start of the '70s, Peter was again getting a little fed up with the job. In his landmark 100th issue he used his scientific know-how to knock up a serum that he thought might remove his spider powers so he could settle down with Gwen Stacy. It had the reverse effect, turning him into more spider than man, with four extra arms. This issue was also the last with Stan Lee credited as writer – it was down to new writer Roy Thomas, who took the reins in the next issue, to figure out how to revert Peter to the conventional number of limbs...

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #121

Gwen Stacy was Peter's love interest for several years but this issue in June 1973 was her big moment... and her last. Norman Osborn, alias the Green Goblin, gets in a rage because he blames the web-slinger for his son Harry's drug problem, and takes his revenge by hurling Peter's beloved off a bridge much as Peter had always feared. But superheroes always save the day, right? Not this time. Spidey's web reaches the plummeting Gwen, but the force of the fall breaks her neck. A dark day indeed for Spidey and shocked fans everywhere.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #129

This issue in February 1974 saw the debut of two series mainstays by writer Gerry Conway and artist Ross Andru. One was recurring villain the Jackal, and the other, who made the cover, was Frank Castle, the Punisher. Armed to the teeth and bearing his trademark skull design on his chest, the Punisher believed that problems should not be solved with webs and quips, but with searing bullets. He would go on to become a major force in the Marvel universe, not just in the comics but in movie and TV outings too.



AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #131

As if dodging the Punisher's bullets wasn't tough enough, a couple of months later Spider-Man had to cope with his Aunt May marrying one of his greatest enemies, Doctor Octopus. It turned out Ock wasn't after May's money, but rather - bizarrely - a nuclear reactor she'd inherited! And if Peter thought that was bad, a few years later he had to see her walk down the aisle again with cigar-chomping J. Jonah Jameson!

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #194

For a science nerd and wallflower, Peter Parker certainly got the girls. Must be the costume. 1979 saw the debut of another ongoing woman in Spidey's life, the Black Cat, Felicia Hardy is a skilled thief who crosses paths with Spider-Man on the night-time streets. And everyone knows you should never let a black cat cross your path. They eventually end up as lovers, but Felicia has no interest in the man beneath the mask – it's the web-slinger she's not for. Which makes a change, given the bad press that Spidey usually gets.

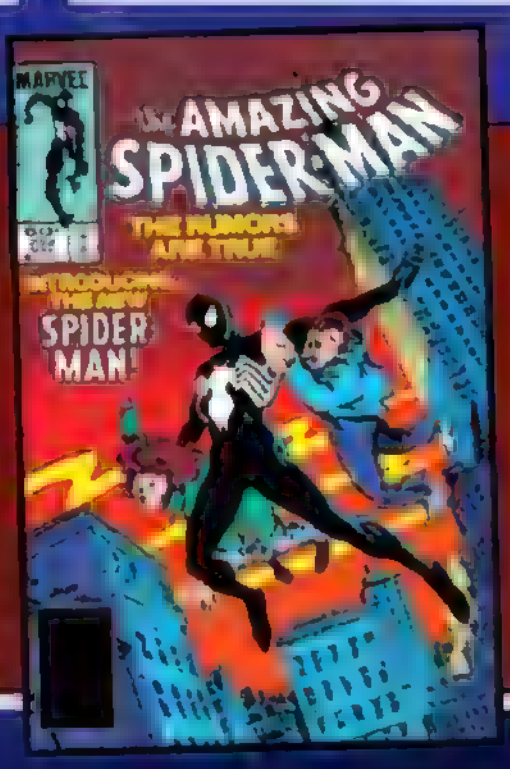
WHAT IF...? #30

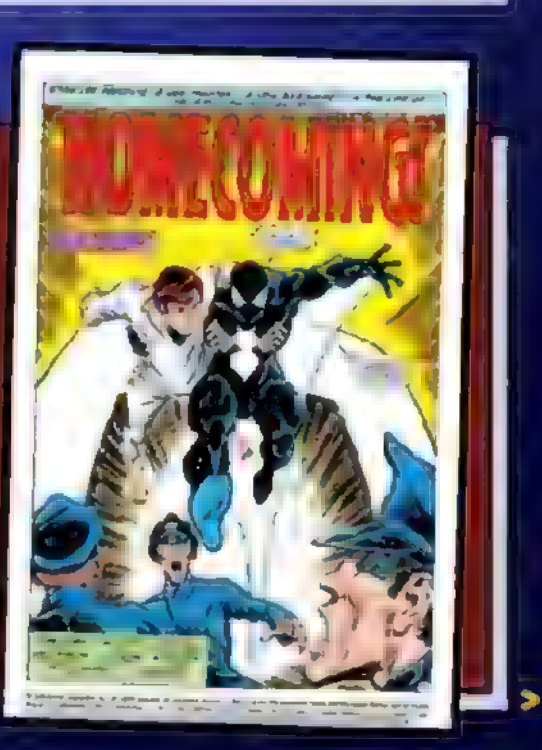
We need to talk about Peter. And Peter. And Peter. And... you get the idea. The concept of clones has been a recurring one in the Spider-Man books, beginning in 1975 when a short-lived clone of Parker was introduced in *Amazing Spider-Man* #149. A *What If* comic in 1981 pondered the question "What if Spider-Man's Clone Had Lived?" – the two Peters divided up the job of being Spider-Man and living a normal life. Of course, by the '90s we discovered that the clone had indeed survived in the actual Marvel timeline...

MARVEL TAILS #1

Spider-Man has always liked a quip and a ready gag, but in 1983 the joke was on him in the adventures of Peter Porker, the Spectacular Spider-Ham. Yes, a Spider-pig. Weirdly, Spider-Ham would meet the real deal decades later in the Spider-Verse storyline. Marvel also let indie creator Peter Bagge loose on Spidey in 2002's non-canon one-shot *The Megalomaniacal Spider-Man*, featuring a far more cynical wall-crawler than we were used to.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #252

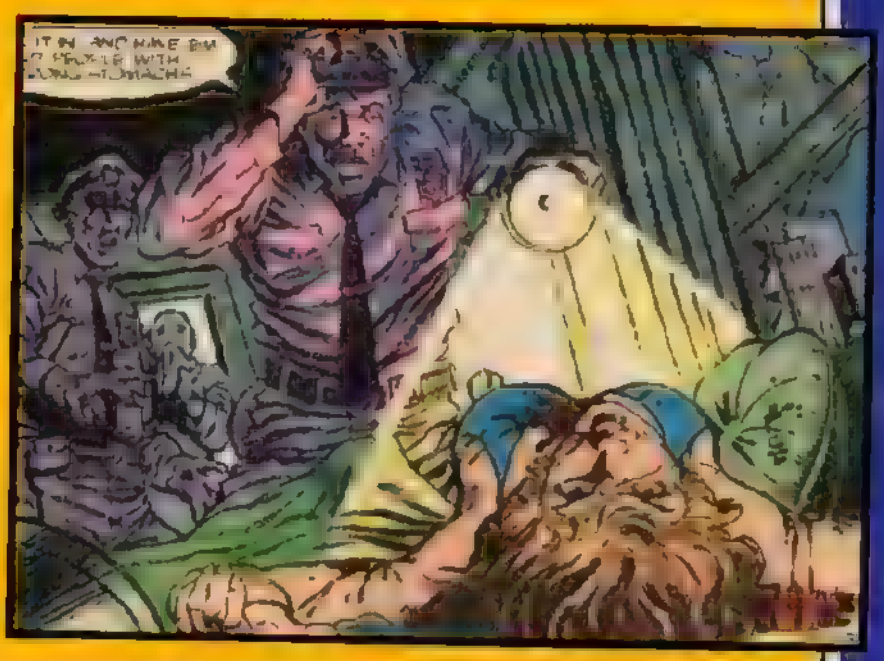




Spider-Man's striking red and blue costume had become recognised the world over by 1984, so Marvel went and changed it for an all-black outfit with a white spider on the chest, but still with the traditional white eye-holes. The new costume debuted in *Amazing Spider-Man* #252 on a cover that was a homage to *Amazing Fantasy* #15, but the explanation for it came in the eighth issue of the year's huge crossover series *Secret Wars*, which saw Marvel's heroes transported to Battleworld to slug it out. Spidey's threads got trashed and some alien technology gave him a new look – and, eventually, a big problem.

THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #107

For all his personal griefs, Spider-Man's generally been an easy-going kind of hero, but in October 1985 we saw a darker side to him when long-term supporting character Captain Jean DeWolff of the NYPD was killed at the hands of the Sin-Eater. Written by Peter David, *Spectacular Spider-Man* #107 sees Spider-Man lose the plot completely and almost kill the villain – actually one of Jean's colleagues, policeman Stan Carter – until Daredevil brings him to his senses.

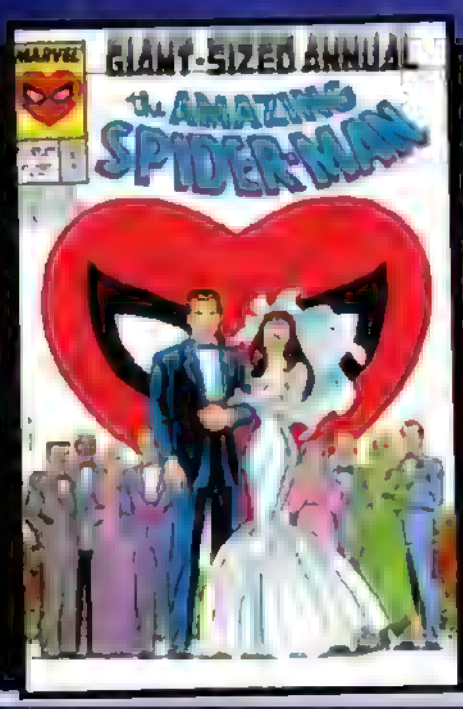


WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #18

Remember we said that the black costume was going to cause problems for Spidey? It wasn't just because it showed deodorant marks. Turns out, the alien technology was actually a symbiotic creature called Venom, and after Peter got rid of the costume it turned its attention on Eddie Brock, who made his debut in *Web Of Spider-Man* #18 in 1986. Venom would go on to be one of the most popular characters in not just the Spider-Man titles, but the Marvel Universe as a whole, getting his own titles and being a constant thorn in Peter's side.

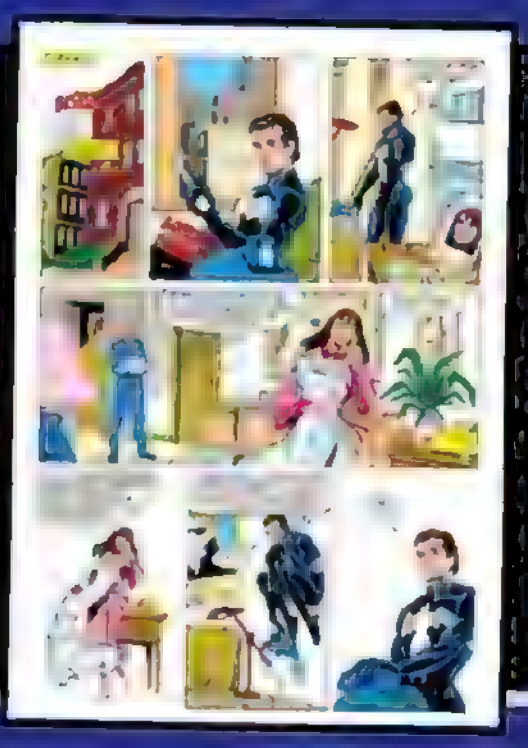
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #289

Spidey still had more Earthbound villains to contend with. The Hobgoblin, utilising the look and technology of old foe the Green Goblin, had been introduced in 1983 but it wasn't until 1987 that he was finally unmasked... as Peter Parker's recently-killed friend Ned Leeds. Later on the story is changed and Ned is deemed to have been brainwashed to take the fall by the real Hobgoblin, Roderick Kingsley.



AMAZING SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #21

In 1987, Peter Parker finally hit the jackpot he'd been promised two decades earlier when he and Mary Jane got married. Even the old blowhard J. Jonah Jameson had a tear in his eye. And there wasn't so much as a Z-list super-villain on hand to delay the nuptials, setting the stage for a new, more mature period in Spider-Man's life that would last several years. With a wife and a mortgage comes great responsibility... but would happiness last? This is the funny books, what do you think?

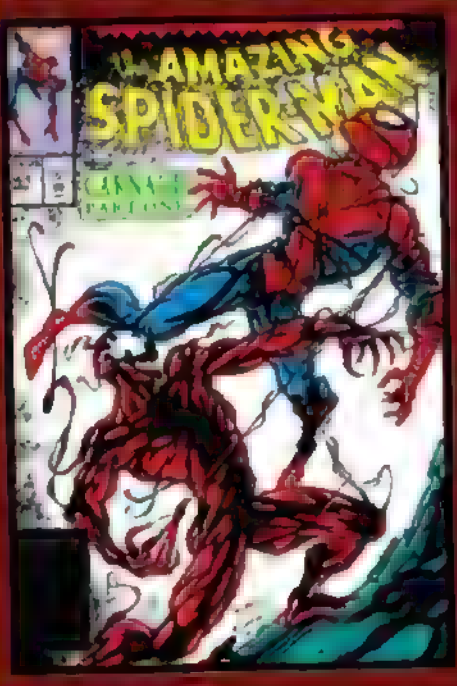


SPIDER-MAN #1

The '90s was all about big, brash, powerful superheroes, and much of that was down to Todd McFarlane. In August 1990 he turned his big-screen super-heroics on Spidey with the launch of a brand new Spider-Man book. This was also the age of multiple variant covers, pre-bagged collector's item editions, and a bombastic return to what some might now consider over-the-top action, with McFarlane's first arc featuring the Lizard. It was to be McFarlane's last work for Marvel, as he went on from this title to form a little company you might have heard of called Image...

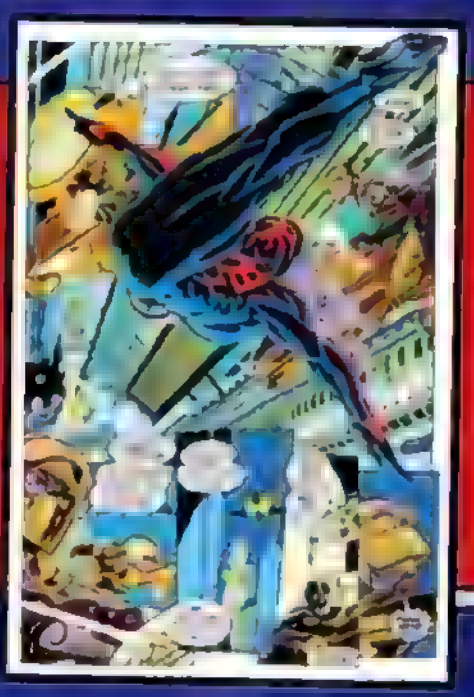
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #361

If you thought Venom was bad, wait until you meet his son. Well, not really. Carnage was another symbiote, created when Venom briefly bonded to Eddie Brock's former cellmate, psychopathic Cletus Kasady. With added psycho-ness from Cletus in the mix, Spidey was forced to go to none other than Venom to help bring the newcomer to book. Venom agreed but Spider-Man, in a rare display of churlishness, roped in Mr Fantastic to get Venom banged up as well. Which ultimately did nothing for their relationship.



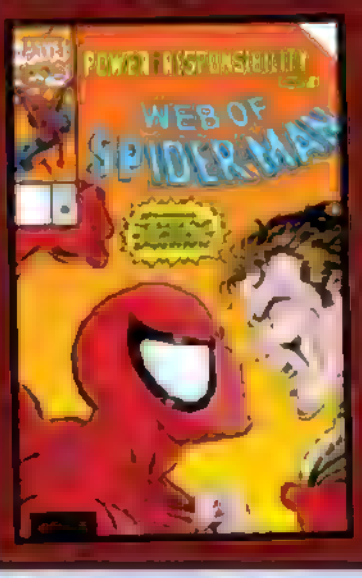
SPIDER-MAN 2099

In 1992 Marvel had a brief fad of transplanting its most recognisable heroes into a world a century or so in the future if the 2099 line. *Spider-Man 2099* featured a brand new identity for the web-slinger of the future, a genetic scientist called Miguel O'Hara, who had been infected with an experimental formula by his not-so-nice bosses at the world-spanning corporation where he worked. Trying to solve the problem, Miguel tried to reboot his DNA but, as is the way of these things in comics, a pesky spider got in the way.



WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #117

So, this clone of Peter Parker. Outside the alternative-reality *What If* storyline, he was deemed to have died at the hands of the villainous Jackal. But the Clone Saga, beginning in 1994, suggested that he had survived and now called himself Ben Reilly, who set himself up as the Scarlet Spider. Then another clone rocked up, Kaine. Then someone cloned Gwen Stacy. By the end of the Clone Saga, nobody knew who was who any more. Nobody can really blame Peter Parker for "retiring" to live with MJ and leaving all these Spider-Clones to it...

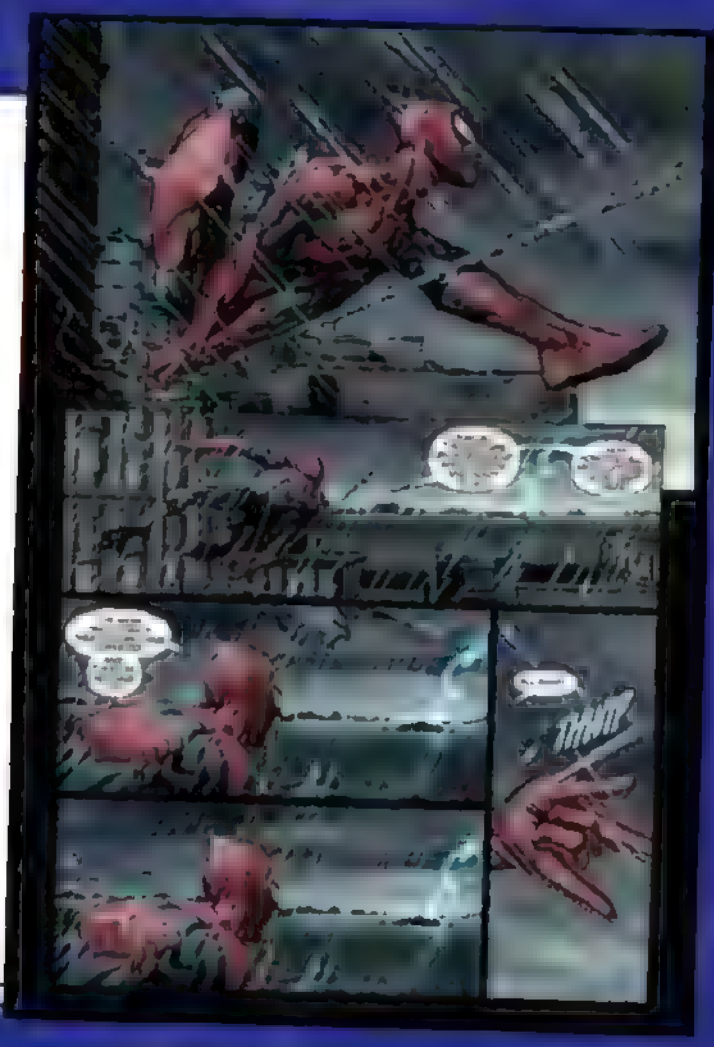


ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN #1

Things had got complicated in the Marvel Universe, especially in the Spider-Man titles, which is why Marvel launched its Ultimate line. *Ultimate Spider-Man* #1 in October 2000 reset the clock, with a more mature bent to the stories and no continuity baggage weighing things down. The radioactive spider that bit Peter gets updated into a genetically-modified one; "genetics" also informs the creation of the new Green Goblin. Thankfully not a clone in sight, though...

NEW AVENGERS #1

By 2005 Peter Parker was back under the spider-mask where he belonged. Although he did try to join the Fantastic Four back in his first appearance, Spidey had always been a loner, but now he decided he was a team player after all..., and went straight to the top. *New Avengers* #1 saw Spider-Man join the ranks of the World's Greatest Superheroes, alongside Captain America, Iron Man, Luke Cage, Spider-Woman and, eventually, Wolverine. The Avengers had disbanded after the Scarlet Witch had a breakdown but came back together for that most comic-book of reasons; the bad guys were staging a prison breakout.

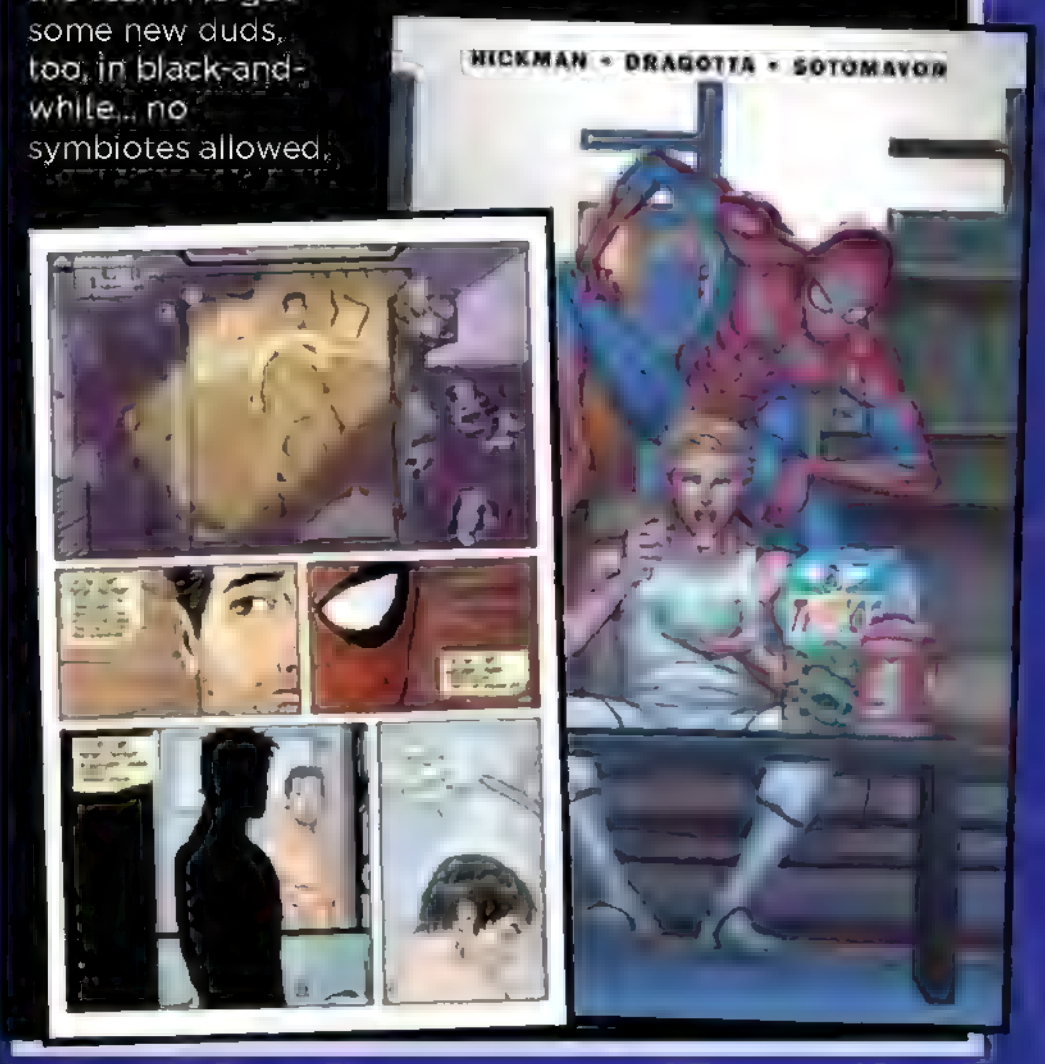


AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #544

Peter Parker might have been happy living in married bliss with Mary Jane Watson, but the fans weren't so enamoured. It was 2007, a new generation of readers were getting into comics, and to be honest, nobody wanted to read about a guy who'd settled down. So in *Amazing Spider-Man* #544, the whole thing was annulled. Not because MJ and Peter weren't getting on, but because other-dimensional ne'er-do-well Mephisto was up to his old tricks again. Aunt May was dying and Spider-Man was powerless, until the devilish rogue offered a choice: Aunt May could live, but he would steal the Parkers' happiness and reset time so they'd never married.

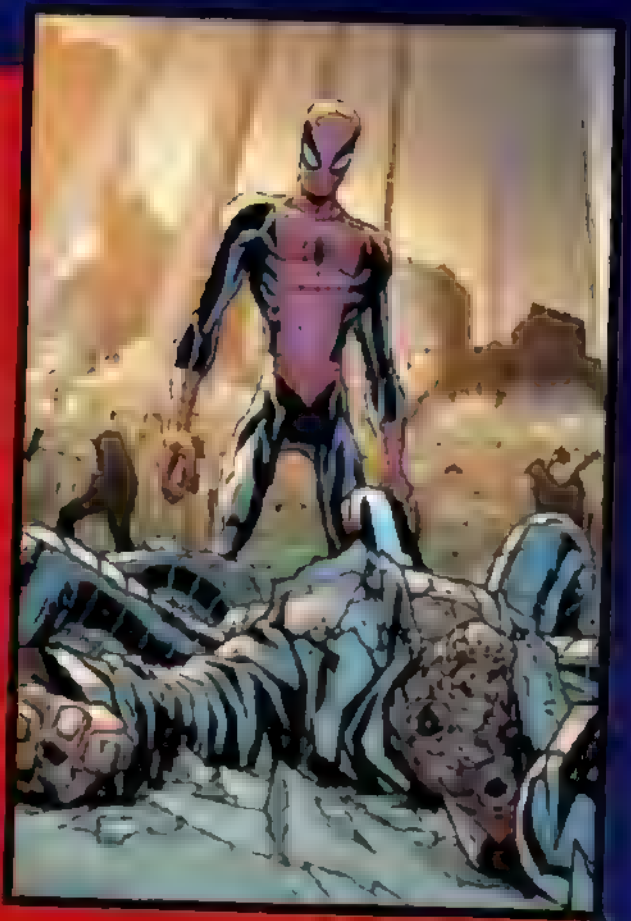
FUTURE FOUNDATION

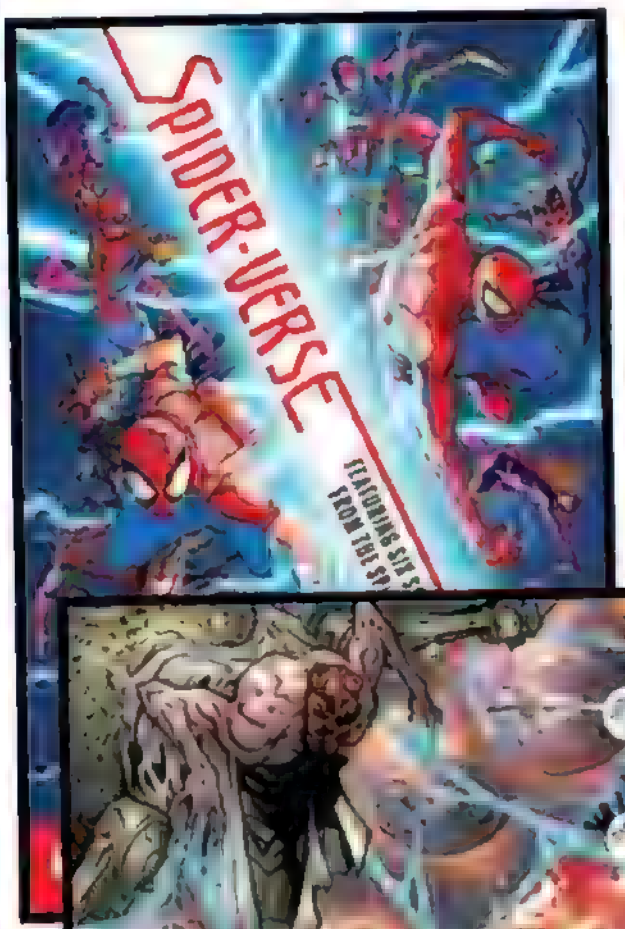
His time in the New Avengers must have given Spidey the team bug, because in 2011 he did what he'd failed to do 40 years earlier and joined the FF. Not quite the Fantastic Four, but close enough: they'd renamed themselves the Future Foundation, and poor old Johnny Storm, the Human Torch, had died seeing off an alien invasion. The Torch had told Mr Fantastic, Invisible Woman and the Thing that Spidey should replace him on the team. He got some new duds, too, in black-and-white... no symbiotes allowed.



AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #700

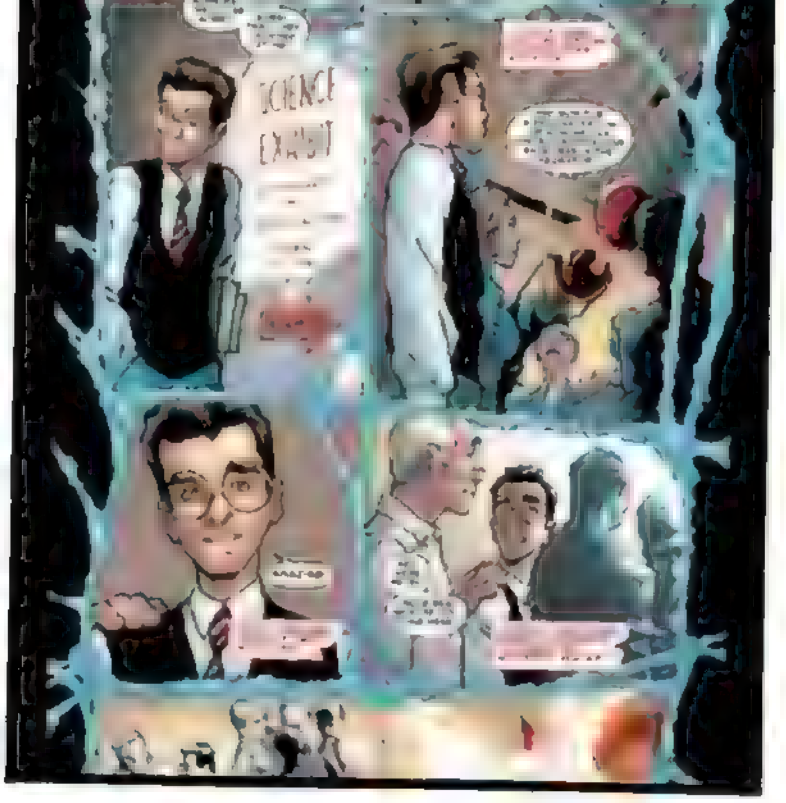
Not content with trying to marry Aunt May back in the day, Doctor Octopus decided in 2013 that he now had designs on Peter Parker's body. No, not like that. Doc Ock is dying and comes up with a nifty little scheme he puts into action in *Amazing Spider-Man* #699-700 – he transplants his mind into Peter's body, and vice-versa, leaving poor old Peter to die in Ock's failing shell. Given quite literally a new lease of life in Spider-Man's bod, Ock becomes something of a reformed character and decides to continue to fight crime as Spidey, as detailed in the 31 issues of *Superior Spider-Man*. He does, of course, dispense with the wise-cracks and ramp up the arrogance to eleven.





THE SPIDER-VERSE

Peter does eventually get back to his own body, just in time for 2014's quite frankly insane Spider-Verse storyline. If you thought all the clones of Peter Parker running around were hard to get a handle on, you haven't seen anything yet. The Spider-Verse event posited a threat from the alien Inheritors that it was going to take more than one Spider-Man to handle... it was going to take all of them. Send in the clones, Ultimate Spider-Man, Spider-Man 2099, everybody. Even Spider-Ham. Yep, it was that serious; they had to send for the pig. There were Spideys from across the multiverse, even some we haven't seen before. There were old Spideys, new Spideys, female Spideys... hello, current fan-favourite Spider-Gwen! It was all quite a way from one accidental little spider bite that very first time in 1962... and what a long, strange trip it has been! CH



MILES AHEAD

Carl Anka looks at the reasons why Miles Morales is so much more than just "the black Spider-Man"

Artist Sara Pichelli's symbolic cover declares there's a new hero in town.

In *Spider-Men*, Bendis proved yet again that he can turn any concept into an engaging story.

For the best part of a decade *Ultimate Spider-Man* was the bedrock for Marvel 1610. For some, Ultimate Peter Parker was the Ultimate Universe. So after Peter's tragic demise at the hands of the Sinister Six in *Ultimate Spider-Man* #160, the question on many a comic book reader's lips was "Who could be important enough to take on the mantle?"

Following the adventures of Ultimate Peter Parker would be no small task. Would Marvel take someone from Peter's current cast and move them to take on the role? Would the Ultimate team introduce a new 1610-remixed version of a traditional Marvel mainstay, to be the new Spider-Man? Or would the role of Spider-Man remain vacant, a constant homage to Peter, the boy wonder who carried the Ultimate Universe through the good times and bad?

The options were myriad, but in the end Marvel chose none of them. Rather than go with the expected Spider-Family option, Brian Michael Bendis instead worked with new Marvel comic book artist Sara Pichelli to introduce Miles Morales, a half-black, half-latino Brooklyn teenager who got bitten by a genetically enhanced spider.

Similar origin story, very different result. Miles Morales has been a Marvel character for only just over six years, but in that time he has caused a tremendous amount of good, both within the world of Marvel and in the wider cultural milieu.

BAM BAM BAM
It wouldn't be Spider-Man without a personal stake in the action.
Get out of here!
Are you crazy, get out!!
Get out of here before it's too late!!
Run!!

"I DON'T WANT TO BE THE BLACK SPIDER-MAN. I WANT TO BE SPIDER-MAN"

MARVEL & © MARVEL. LUMPUS A... RIGHTS RESERVED.

It's not just the costume but the person inside – that's the Marvel way.
DUDE.
THIS IS HUGE.
HOLD ON.
WHAT?
MAKING SURE THE DOOR TO OUR DORM ROOM IS LOCKED?
IT'S ALWAYS LOCKED.
IT'S NOT LOCKED NOW.
IT'S ALMOST ALWAYS LOCKED.
SO TELL ME. WHAT WAS THIS ALL ABOUT?
WAS IRON MAN COOL? WAS SPIDER-MAN COOL? I MEAN THE OTHER ONE.
YOU'RE ALWAYS COOL.
HOLD ON.
WHOA!
WHAT HAPPENED??
IT WAS A DEMON!!!
"DEMON"?
A REAL HONEST TO GOD DEMON!
AND HE TOUCHED ME!
AND I TOUCHED HIM.
WOW.
IT WAS SOOOOO GROSS.
YEAH
SO GROSS, DANKE!
OKAY...
I'M SUPPOSED TO BE ALL COOL ABOUT THIS BECAUSE I'M SUPPOSED TO BE.
BUT I'M NOT
I AM FREAKED OUT
I, YEAH, I GET THAT.
SO FREAKED OUT.
EVERYONE ELSE WAS JUST LIKE 'LAH LAH LAH THERE'S A DEMON.' BUT IT WAS!
SO GROSS.
YES!!!
DUDE. YOU HELD CAPTAIN AMERICA'S SHIELD
I DID.
WAS IT HEAVY?
DANKE I TOUCHED A DEMON FROM HELL!
HEY YOU SAVED THE AVENGERS.
THAT WAS YOU
I TOUCHED THE DEMON.
UH.
MAYBE GO SHOWER.
I SHALL WASH, BUT I WILL NEVER BE CLEAN
OKAY
HUH.
WHAT?
YOU'LL BE
WHAT ABOUT IT?

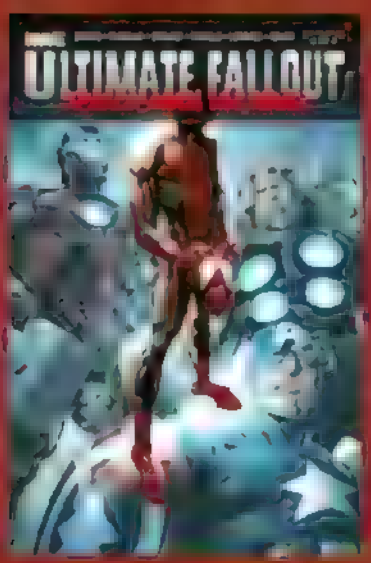
To replace (a version of) one of the most instantly recognisable pop culture figures with an unknown teenager of colour was big. Capital-B Big. Galactus Big. As Stan Lee wrote upon Miles' debut, despite initially implying regret at the loss of his creation Peter Parker, "Doing our bit to try to make our nation, and the world, colour blind is definitely the right thing."

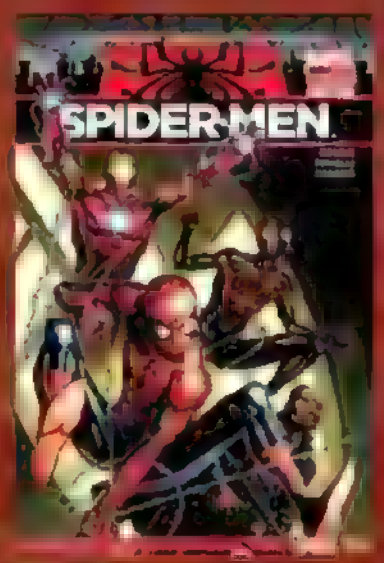
A new hero for a new age of comic books and a new world in which readers enjoy them – Miles is a lot more than just a black Spider-Man. The witty banter and tales of great power and great responsibility are there but, for Miles, his Spider-Man adventures are marked by his different family dynamics. It's not the dreaded "Parker Luck" and tales of science run amok here: Miles is a Spider-Man, but facing his own adventures, his own stories and his own adversaries, all backed up by one of the most intriguing and entertaining supporting casts in recent Marvel history. His father hates superheroes, while his uncle The Prowler tried to blackmail him. His mother learns the truth about Miles' powers only in the most tragic of circumstances. When Miles does get himself a girlfriend in Kate Bishop, her parents turn out to be Hydra agents. While Miles unfortunately didn't make the jump to the MCU for *Spider-Man: Homecoming*,

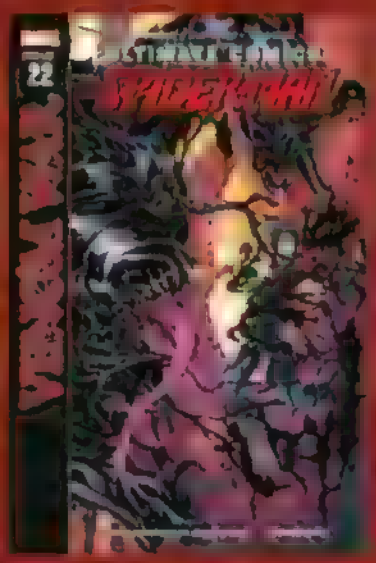
> "DOING OUR BIT TO TRY TO MAKE OUR NATION, AND THE WORLD, COLOUR BLIND IS THE RIGHT THING"

MILESTONE STORIES

The landmarks in the story of Miles Morales, Spider-Man







THE DEBUT

ULTIMATE FALLOUT #4 (2011)

Writer Brian Michael Bendis
Artist Sarah Pichelli

Debuting in a Spider-Man outfit deemed "in real poor taste" by the NYU public and D-grade villain Kangaroo, Miles' debut wasn't the most gracious. But with a shocking venom blast and some self deprecating quips, Miles proved himself as worthy of the Spider-Man name. Greatness from small beginnings.

AMAZING SPIDER-MEN

SPIDER-MEN #5 (2012)

Writer Brian Michael Bendis
Artist Sarah Pichelli

Marvel ex-editor-in-chief Joe Quesada infamously said the day Marvel 616 teamed up with Marvel 1610 was the day Marvel "had officially run out of ideas." The Spider-Men crossover didn't cause the end of the world, but instead provided a fun and wholesome story arc for longtime fans to enjoy. As a story hook at the end, Peter Parker, upon returning to Earth 616, googled his world's version of Miles Morales only to find... something. Bendis, we're still waiting.

THE VENOM WARS

ULTIMATE COMICS: SPIDER-MAN #22 (2013)

Writer Brian Michael Bendis
Artist Sarah Pichelli

Where there is Spider-Man, there is tragedy. In the Venom War arc, Miles learned this brutal lesson, facing off with the symbiote in a frantic battle in a hospital. All seemed well, until Miles surveyed the end of the fight and realised that his mother had been struck by a stray bullet. Her final words, admiring her son's talents, shaped much of the end of Marvel 1610.

THE HAMBURGER THAT SAVED REALITY

SECRET WARS #6 (2016)

Writer Jonathan Hickman
Artist Esad Ribic

Trust Spider-Man to save the world in the most ridiculous way possible. Upon stumbling upon the Molecule Man (the battery to Battle World), Miles offered him a hamburger eight years and three weeks old... and somehow it helped save reality, swaying Owen Reece from Doom's plans. It was silly. It was irrelevant. It was the perfect way for a Spider-Man character to react when faced with world-shattering powers.

SPIDER-MAN IS BLACK

SPIDER-MAN #2 (2016)

Writer Brian Michael Bendis
Artist Sarah Pichelli

"I don't want to be the black Spider-Man. I want to be Spider-Man." When Miles had his suit damaged and Earth 616 learned their new protector wasn't a white superhero, he irked at the qualification. Miles refuting the "new" tag was a statement of intent, both inside and out of the book. He was never a substitute or a replacement, but simply the real deal.

Tom Holland's new pal looks awfully like Miles' BFF Ganke. Miles is a hero with different powers from Peter Parker and a different make up. It is the sight of a different kind of Spider-Man dealing with typically Spider-Man problems that makes Miles stories so thrilling. Where Peter would outsmart, Miles subverts. Where Peter would build, Miles sneaks and strikes with his venom blast. In Miles Morales, Bendis has created a truly new hero, so when everyone looks left, this new Spider-Man can turn right.

It hasn't always been great and it hasn't always been perfect for Miles. Creative run in fact sometimes Mr Morales has been a victim of his own success, appearing in so many Marvel crossovers that his solo adventures have been regularly derailed. That one of Marvel's most prominent black heroes is written by a white man does raise the occasional eyebrow, but at no point so far has Bendis written Miles as anything other than a genuine, authentic hero. More dubious corners of the comic book world may claim that Miles is diversity for diversity's sake, but in six short years he has been arguably Marvel's biggest quantifiable success alongside Kamala Khan's Ms. Marvel – a hero taking the mantle and principles of the past and taking them forward into a bold new world for everyone.

Thank you, Miles. We salute you.

The new Spidey has been one of Marvel's most successful reboots.

IN A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

As the Justice League gets its latest Rebirth revamp this year, **David Barnett** traces the history of the ultimate super-team

Super-teams typically come together to face off against a villain that none of the heroes could vanquish individually. For the Avengers, it was nothing less than an Asgardian god, Loki. The X-Men's first mission was to prevent evil mutant Magneto from wreaking havoc after taking control of a missile base. The new-found cosmic ray-imbued powers of the Fantastic Four were given an airing to halt the Mole Man attacking the surface world with the aid of gigantic beasts bursting out of the sidewalk.

[illegible] hey, this wa[illegible] '60s, and the B[illegible] previous decade meant that no-one batted an eyelid at th[illegible] likes of Starro the Conqueror, come to Earth to have his wicked intergalactic way, so an evil extraterrestrial echinoderm was an entirely suitable foe for this gathering of comics' finest.

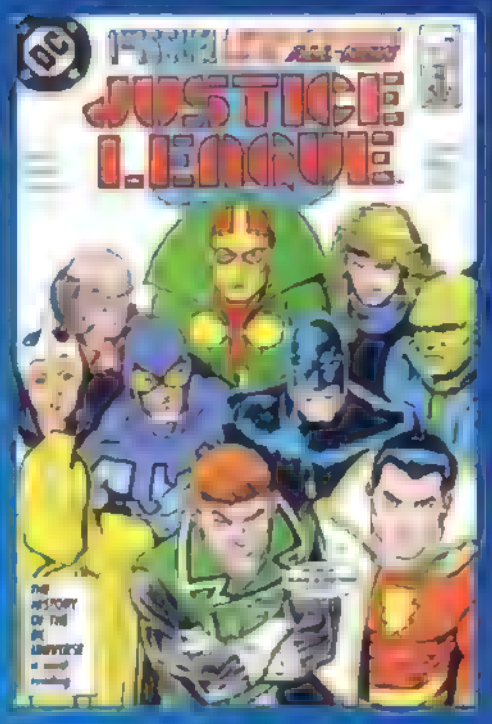
In these modern times when superheroes regularly band together just to nip down to the supermarket for a weekly shop, the idea of the super-team is nothing new. But back in 1960, it was a

[illegible] al Periodical [illegible] DC was then [illegible]ially known, who had been gradually re-introducing Golden Age DC characters since the middle of the 1950s, repackaging and updating them from their roots in the '30s and '40s. Superheroes had fallen out of fashion in the early '50s but DC's revived characters were now all doing well in their individual titles: Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Aquaman, Flash, Martian Manhunter and Green Lantern. But even issue-to-issue continuity was a haphazard thing in those days, when readers could not be sure to find successive issues on the newsstand. As for shared universes? Wonder Woman or Superman might regularly save the world with no sign or mention of the planet's other super-powered champions.

SUPER LEAGUE

Schwartz, in an interview with writer Roy Thomas for *Alter Ego* magazine, recalled the process that led to the birth of the Justice League: "After The Flash proved successful, they said, 'What do you want to do next?' I

IMAGES © DC COMICS 2017. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



Above left: Cover by Paquette and Fairbairn for the second issue of the ongoing 2016 series.
Above: A full in the action in *Justice League Rebirth* #1 by Bryan Hitch.
Above right: Giffen and DeMatteis brought a whole new sensibility to the Justice League in the 1986 revamp pencilled by Kevin Maguire.

said, 'I want to do Green Lantern,' because that was really a favourite of mine. When Green Lantern proved successful, they said, 'What do you want to do next?' I said, 'I'd like to do The Justice Society of America, but I don't like the word Society, because it's like a social group, and I want to use the word League, because it's a more familiar word to young readers, like the National League and American League.' And that's how that happened."

Schwartz got together with star writer Gardner Fox, under whose hand the old Justice Society had enjoyed some success back in the 1940s, and the updated baseball-league inspired version of the classic superhero team got its first outing in *The Brave and The Bold* #28, in spring 1960, Starro and all.

The team was an instant hit, and by November the Justice League of America had their own title, revolving around the core seven heroes but adding new members to the roster, including Atom, Hawkman and Green Arrow.

Although Superman and Batman were the most recognisable properties in the line-up, they didn't even appear on that first cover, and often not at all in the stories, allowing the other characters room to breathe and develop. Despite being launched in the white heat of the space race years, the Justice League were also a long way from getting their satellite headquarters in orbit around Earth. In the early days they operated out of a cave ('Batman's influence?' and were followed around by a teenager named Snapper Carr, who became the League's "mascot" and, presumably, someone for the young readers to identify with in this world of costumed champions.

In fact, it was Carr who put the mockers on the cosy cave set-up, inadvertently letting its location slip to the Joker.

> **'LEGENDS' PAVED THE WAY FOR ONE OF THE BIGGEST REBOOTS OF THE TEAM IN ITS HISTORY**

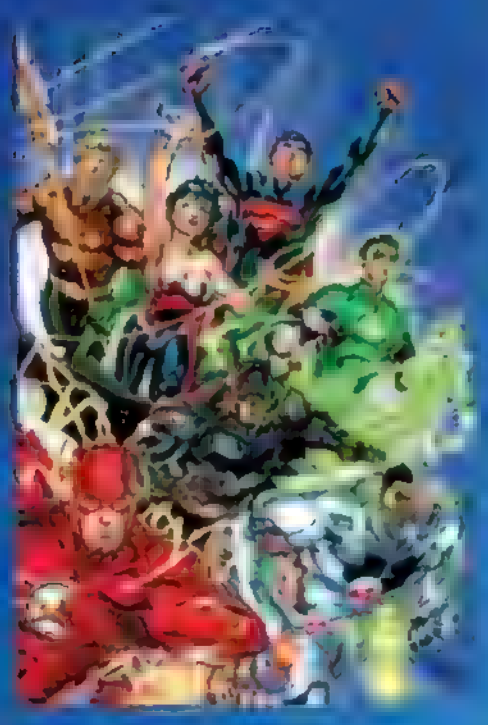
After ten years of adventures, the Justice League had to bid farewell to their subterranean hangout and finally, in 1970, they got the orbital clubhouse they deserved.

LEGENDARY REBOOT

The book's success had been out of this world, too, even after Gardner Fox's departure. He was replaced on writing duties by Denny O'Neill, who wasted no time in shaking up what would become an ever-changing roster. Out went Wonder Woman and Martian Manhunter. In came Black Canary, Elongated Man, Red Tornado and other mainstays of the '70s League, and there followed a stellar series of writers including Len Wein, Steve Englehart, Gerry Conway, Cary Bates and Elliot S! Maggin.

The *Justice League of America* ran for 261 issues, right up to 1986, with the final storyline seeing the deaths of JLA members Steel and Vibe and widespread resignations as part of the *Legends* multi-title crossover event, which paved the way for one of the most significant reboots of the team in its history.

The *Legends* crossover came on the back of the epic



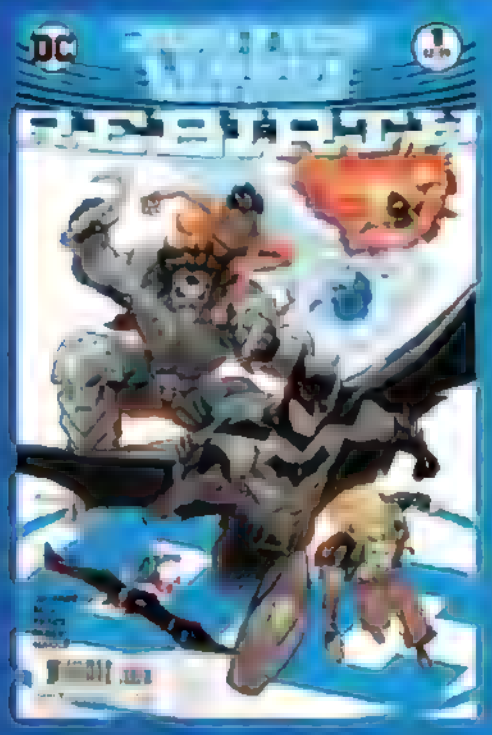
Above: The New 52 reboot was drawn by fan favourite artists Jim Lee and Scott Williams.
Right: The Rebirth title by Bryan Hitch includes Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, The Flash, Aquaman, Cyborg and two new Green Lanterns.

Crisis On Infinite Earths, DC's huge bid in the '80s to try to make sense of an impossibly tangled continuity nightmare that was like a three-way road crash involving lorries carrying string, spaghetti and rubber bands, *Crisis* had simplified the DC multiverse's umpteen parallel worlds and brought a lot of heroes who'd inhabited different Earths all in one place, meaning there could be a fresh new line-up for the new title, beginning again with issue one. The new *Justice League* dropped the "America", and as well as bringing in some new – often surprising – faces, also injected a healthy dose of comedy, courtesy of writers Keith Giffen and J.M. DeMatteis and artist Kevin Maguire.

The seemingly ever-increasing roster featured a long-suffering Batman trying to whip into shape a diverse team of individualists including Martian Manhunter, Blue Beetle, Booster Gold, Doctor Light, Black Canary, Captain Atom, Fire and Ice, Green Lantern Guy Gardner and even Rocket Red. Who would have thought the Russians could have any influence on America's highest super-powered office?

The tone was quirky and tongue-in-cheek, the dialogue snappy as the characters bounced off each other. The approach proved popular and the book – eventually morphing into *Justice League International* – ran for five years under the Giffen DeMatteis writing team, and another five years after that.

By 1996, however, sales were on the wane, and it was time to go back to basics. Grant Morrison was brought in to revamp the League, which he did by returning it to its original line-up. The issue numbering was once again reset to zero and the title renamed simply *JLA*. Morrison took a big-screen approach to the storytelling, taking the idea back to its central concept: the team existed to tackle huge threats that nobody else could.



Above: The 2011 "New 52" line-up, like the original Justice League as Julius Schwartz conceived it, included DC's biggest names. Left: The newest roster in the JLA ongoing series includes Batman, Black Canary, the Atom, Vixen, the Ray, Killer Frost and Lobo.

While he was on JLA Watchtower duty and also writing *Aztek* for DC, Morrison was also bending heads out of shape in *The Invisibles* for DC's mature readers line, Vertigo, but the approach he took in the former two books was very different. As he explained to Jay Babcock in a 1996 interview for *Arthur* magazine: "What I'm doing with *JLA* and *Aztek* is going back to the kind of stuff I liked when I was a kid and trying to do an updated version of it for kids now."

Morrison wrote 49 issues and the title continued until 2005, when the League again provided the conduit for another big DC-wide crossover, this time *Infinite Crisis*. It would mean the cancellation of the title with issue 125, but the crew would go out with a bang, quite literally, as their orbiting Watchtower base was sensationally destroyed.

So one year later, it was back to where the Justice League had started, as Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman met up for drinks and snacks in a cave – this time the one under Wayne Manor – and decided once again to get the band back together. Oh, and they were putting America back in the title, for volume two of *Justice League of America*. And, from 2006, things went swimmingly... until the New 52 in 2011.

DC likes to wield the broom and make a clean sweep of things periodically, but the New 52 reset the clock almost like never before. After the Flashpoint crossover, everything went back to year zero. The Justice League ditched the "America" once again and writer Geoff Johns and artist Jim Lee started over from scratch, giving the squad a new origin. But it also expanded the JL family with another stab at *Justice League International*, plus *Justice League Dark*, in which occult detective John Constantine, never really known as a team player, nevertheless assembled a motley crew of DC's supernatural characters. Then, even more confusingly, there was another *Justice League of America* title launched, headed up by Suicide Squad's leading lady Amanda Waller.

> **IT'S ABOUT PEOPLE WHO MAKE EACH OTHER BETTER THAN THEY CAN BE ON THEIR OWN**

NOW FOR REBIRTH

If the New 52 was meant to simplify things, it certainly threatened to recreate the string-spaghetti-rubber band truck smash for the Justice League titles, and it was no great surprise to anyone that the whole New 52 universe was ceremoniously brought to an end, and by February 2016

DC was in the throes of yet another re-organisation with the titles all being relaunched under the Rebirth banner.

This pretty much brings us up to date. 2017 is a big year for the Justice League, not least because the movie version is set for release at the end of the year – but also because the Justice League gets a Rebirth revamp under the guiding hand of Steve Orlando. The stage was set for a big comeback with the *Justice League Vs Suicide Squad* miniseries.

Like Morrison before him, Orlando wants to take the team back to basics. He told the Comicosity website earlier this year: "Ultimately, putting a JLA together is about finding people who can make each other better – better than they can be on their own. And that goes for everyone. No character in the JLA is perfect, and that's a big part of it coming out of *Justice League Vs Suicide Squad*, with even Batman understanding that there are things he can't do on his own. His way is a great way, but it's not the only way. Other people need to come in and it needs to mean more than what Batman can do alone. That's why the JLA is there."

Batman is the lynchpin in the new Justice League of America, which debuted in February, following a series of Orlando-penned one-shots focussing on some of the fresh roster, a mix of those who might not necessarily be seen as A-list players plus some familiar faces... or familiar names, at least.

These include the Atom, Vixen, the Ray and Killer Frost. But the Atom, for example, is a not the Ray Palmer of old, it's Palmer's protege Ryan Choi, created by Gail Simone and Grant Morrison. The one-shots filled in a lot of post Rebirth backstory, with Jody Houser joining Orlando to tell the story of businesswoman and fashion icon Mari McCabe's journey to becoming Vixen, for one. Orlando and Houser teamed up again to tell the story of villain-turned-hero Killer Frost.

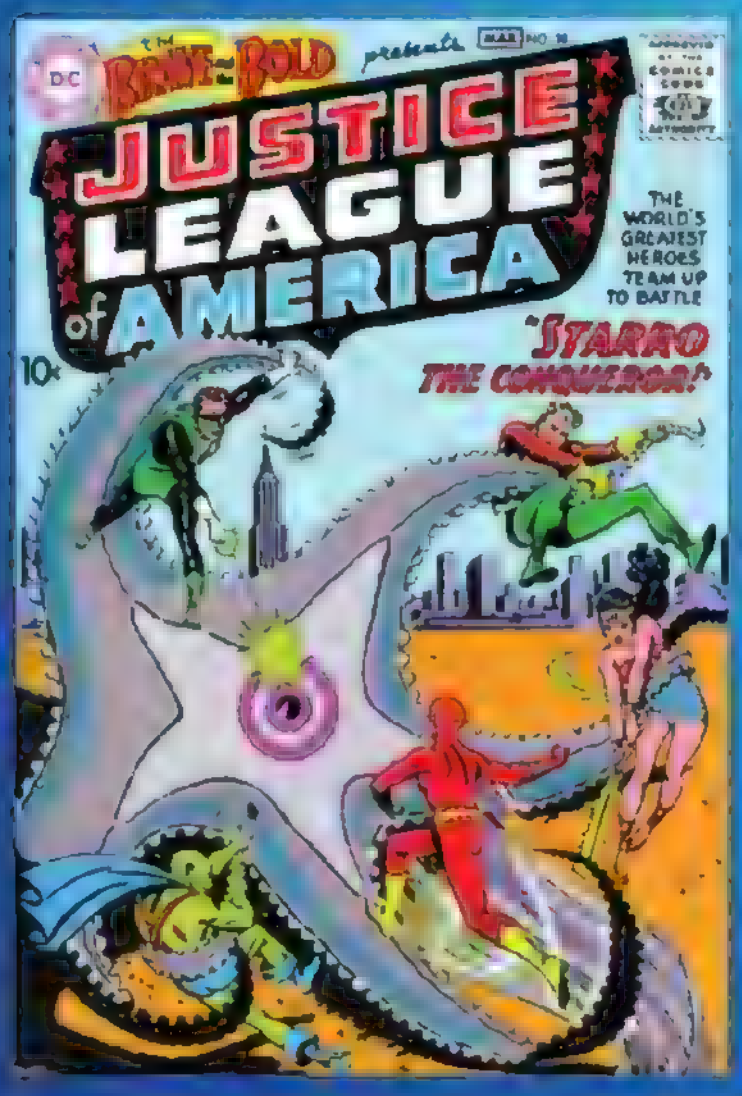
Batman has already got some veteran help in the form of Black Canary and Lobo, creating an interesting mix for the new Justice League and a line up that is altogether more human and down-to-earth than perhaps the "classic" incarnations featuring DC's biggest hitters. And, in a very neat tie up right back to the original League, the new JLA title opens with Batman and Killer Frost exploring the long abandoned JLA cave from all the way back in the '60s. But, as Batman observes, the cave is just a relic of a bygone era. The Justice League of America is looking forward now, not backwards.

Like every good super-team, the Justice League is about being stronger together, heroes using their unique skills in concert with each other to defeat the perils and threats that one hero, even Superman, can't tackle alone.

Or, as DC's official blurb for the relaunch says: "This is a Justice League that looks like America, that proves Heroism can look like ANYTHING and ANYONE. From February 1960 to February 2017, the mission hasn't changed. It's just evolved."

Above right: Rebirth issue 1 variant cover by Tony S. Daniel and Tomeu Morey.

Below: The Justice League kicked off with this iconic cover to *The Brave And The Bold* #28 in 1960, and the first series ran until April 1987. As well as juggling an ever-changing roster of members, it introduced some notable villains, guest stars and continuity challenges.



JUST A PILGRIM

Karl Stock talks to **Garth Ennis** about his overlooked post-apocalyptic Western miniseries, overshadowed by his breakthrough hits and later triumphs alike

SEE THAT? HE SHOT A DOG! HE BLEW IT TO PIECES. HE'S TOTALLY PSYCHO!
I SHOULD BE IN CHARGE AROUND HERE AND IF YOU CAN'T SEE THAT--
DAMMIT!
MOVE, FOOL!
RRRRIIIIEEEEEEEEE

In the wake of the conclusion of his hit Vertigo series *Preacher* in the autumn of 2000, Garth Ennis was looking for a way to leave Ireland and set up home in America. At the same time, *Wizard*, the dominant comics magazine of the day, was setting up its own indie comics publishing arm in Black Bull Entertainment, and the editor approached by *Wizard* founder Gareb Shamus to take the line forward was Jimmy Palmiotti at the time both editor and inker of Ennis and Steve Dillon's *Punisher* run for the Marvel Knights line.

The quid pro quo was obvious: *Wizard* would sponsor Ennis' US work visa, and in return he would create new material for Black Bull. With the debut issue appearing in May 2001, the first (and, as it turned out, final) project which Ennis devised was *Just a Pilgrim*, and for a writer who spent a good part of the 1990s shakily learning the writing ropes on *2000 AD*, there's a good argument that this series came closest of all his work

to the bleak, anarchic, ideas-packed, visually dynamic vision of the Galaxy's Greatest Comic. That Judge Dredd's masterfully pulpy co-creator Carlos Ezquerra was the artist on the title accounted for a large part of its success, as Ennis agrees.

The story's lead was The Pilgrim, an unnamed, rifle-toting wanderer in a weather-beaten duster and fedora, doomed to wander the parched-dry Earth after a cataclysmic solar event known only as "the Burn", which evaporated every one of the world's oceans. Visually, the character bore a passing resemblance to *Preacher*'s Saint of Killers, and to Clint Eastwood's "Man With No Name" archetype, so beloved of Ennis in his formative years.

Yet even as he came to save vulnerable travellers from sadistic, disfigured pirates and mutated, mind-controlling monsters, the Pilgrim was revealed as a horribly flawed character – an ex-marine driven to cannibalism to survive and fuelled by a religious fanaticism as all-encompassing as the trauma-hollowed void in his soul. The cross burned into his own face is a brutal reminder of what drives him.

"When I was a little kid I saw a map of the world that included the ocean floor," says Ennis now. "Earth with the water drained away, you might say. I think it came with an issue of *National Geographic*. I still have it kicking around somewhere. Anyway, the notion of all those peaks and ridges and canyons down there stayed with me, and years later it all seemed like a fairly original setting for a post-apocalyptic adventure; at the time I couldn't think of anyone having done it before. There was a reason for that, I came to realise..."

Ennis agrees that the Pilgrim was a memorable protagonist, and the character still seems fresh in his mind, a full 15 years after *Just a Pilgrim*'s second and final series "Garden of Eden" came to a conclusion. "He was a fucking lunatic who found himself cast as hero and villain," says the writer. "He fought the bad and protected the weak. He ate people. I think the enjoyment of writing him came from pushing the notion of a heroic protagonist further than most people would expect it to go, and seeing how far the audience were prepared to accompany me. There was a certain sly, dark amusement in doing that, maybe."

ADMIRABLE ARTIST

Although he believes there were a lot of good ideas in it, Ennis now views the *Just a Pilgrim* saga as a flawed piece of work on his part, although he won't hear a word said against the dependable brilliance of Ezquerra's art. For the artist himself – the man who created the look of two of British comics' biggest icons in Judge Dredd and Strontium Dog – the Pilgrim remains one of his favourite characters.

"He was perfect for me, an anti-hero, a desert pirate, like Mad Max in a spaghetti western," says Ezquerra. "That was ideal for me, and Garth knew it. I like my characters to look different from any other, and the Pilgrim might look similar to the Saint of Killers or others with the long overcoat and hat, but I added a point to that hat so even in silhouette you know it's him. But it's the face which shows the real man he is, his tormented personality, and how that changes throughout the story." The pirate leader Castenado was also a favourite; Ezquerra loves pirates.

Even after a slew of projects together, from Judge Dredd in the 1990s through DC's *Bloody Mary*, the Authority spin-off *A Man Called Kev*, *The Tankies* as part of Ennis' war series Battlefields and many others, the writer's admiration for his childhood artistic hero is understandably palpable. "I met Carlos very early in my career, back in 1989," Ennis recalls. "I was initially a little in awe of him, but he's such a decent, down-to-earth guy, that didn't last long; the same thing happened when I met [*his late Preacher co-creator*] Steve Dillon. I was lucky enough to have Carlos assigned to my very first Dredd, where he made me look better than I deserved.

"We hit it off and he gave me a look through his sketchbook to see if there were any characters I thought had legs – something he was in the habit of doing with John Wagner and Alan Grant, I believe. That's where Bloody Mary came >

Opposite page: All kinds of genre elements were thrown into the mix, even sci-fi monsters

Above: From pirates to shipwrecks, the setup was perversely nautical, just without any water

Below: Covers for the series were provided by star artists including Mark Texeira, Glenn Fabry and Kevin Nowlan

N-N-NOW WAIT A MINUTE-- PLEASE--
YOU TRYNNA KEEP-NT, YOU SNAKE-HEARTED VARMINT?
YOU REPENT YOUR SINS AGAINST GOD? YOU ACCEPT THE SALVATION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST?
Y...YES...
YES, YES DAMN RIGHT I DO SALVATION, REPENT MY SINS, ALL OF IT! JUST TELL ME WHERE I SIGN UP!
HAVE YOU SEEN THE LIGHT?
YES, YES!
HAVE YOU SEEN THE LIGHT?!
YEEEESS!

from. By the time of *Pilgrim* we'd done quite a few things together, and he seemed very much the obvious choice for this story – the larger-than-life character, the setting, the action, the humour. The series was certainly influenced by classic *2000 AD*; a good deal of my genre writing always will be."

Besides his fellow Dredd creator Wagner and long-time *2000 AD* collaborator Grant, it's hard to identify any writer whose work fits Ezquerra's art as well as Ennis. "Carlos has the wonderful ability to make the impossible seem easy; he can handle things that would leave many artists floundering," says the writer. "If you're in tune with his work, you can relax a little bit when you're writing – you know he'll keep the characters constant and distinct, just as you know you can be as outlandish as you want with every aspect of the story. That wonderful sense of the grotesque he has will carry you through. I loved the Pilgrim himself; he was quite simply classic Ezquerra – a nice blend of the formidable and the ludicrous, a giant of a character from a giant of an artist. It's hard for me to overstate my admiration for the mighty Carlos, both as artist and collaborator."

Above: If the oceans have evaporated and there's no water, how has anyone survived? Where do they find fuel or ammunition? It's never quite explained ..

Right: Ezquerra indulges a taste for the grotesque as much as Ennis does

Below: Issue 4 cover by Bill Sienkiewicz

As a launchpad for Black Bull, *Just a Pilgrim* did very well, and there was even talk of film development. "But like most comic properties, that went nowhere," says editor Palmiotti. "*Just a Pilgrim* was an easy gig for me, mainly because I was working with total professionals. I loved the post-apocalyptic setting, and I think it was a nice break for Garth as well, to do something as wild as this." Palmiotti looks at this series, Mark Waid and Amanda Conner's *Gatecrasher* and other titles like *Beautiful Killer* and *New West* as successes, despite their obscurity. "As a matter of fact, I think they would probably do better now, since audiences are more used to non-superhero work. We were

doing a bit of groundbreaking, and with that comes the problems of introducing something new."

DEPRESSING DESERT

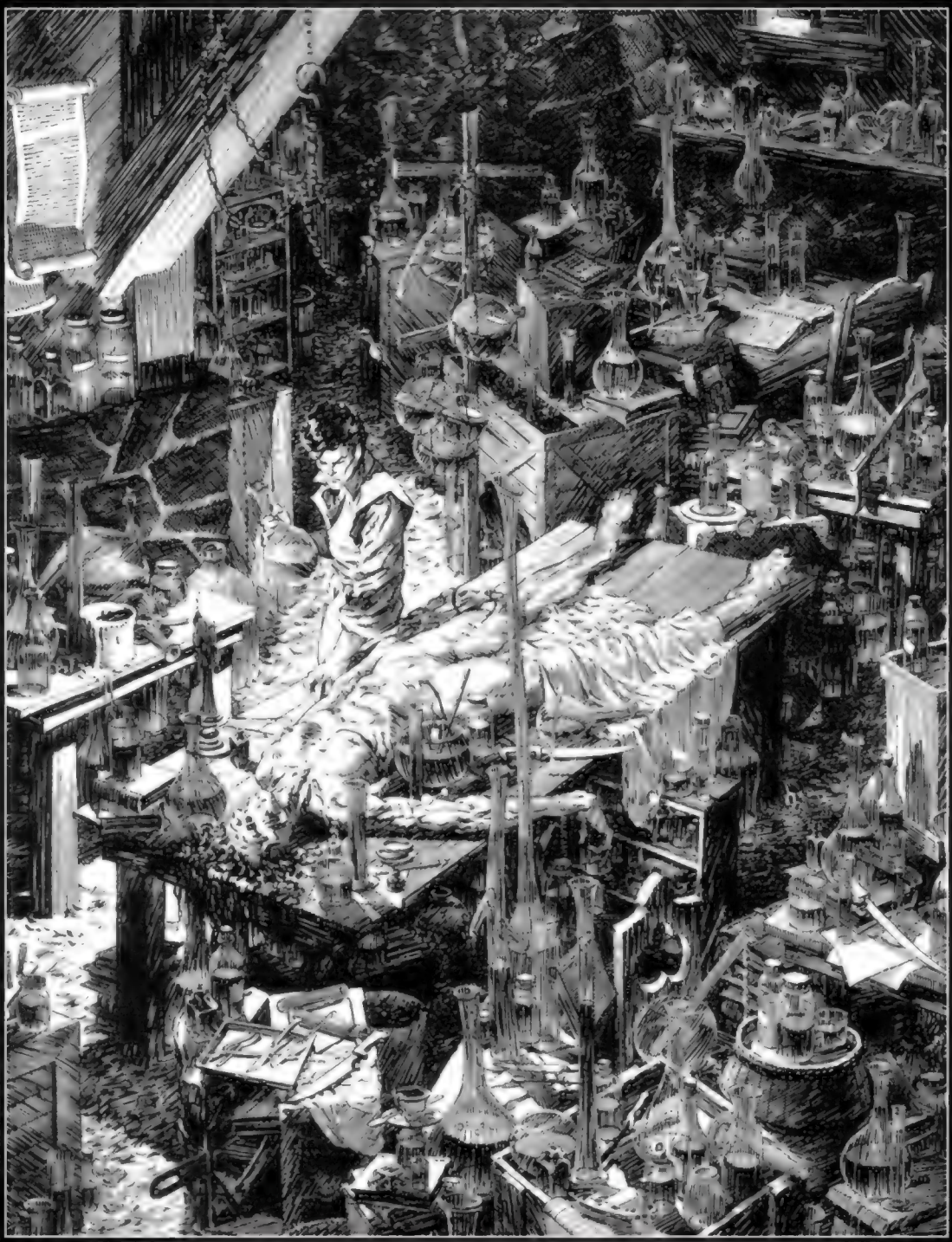
After the first series of *Just a Pilgrim*, however, Ennis had grown tired of the "slight piss-up/brewery organisation problem" he was sensing from the immigration lawyer *Wizard* had contracted, and both the lack of creator ownership and his own issues with the setting were turning him off the story. "'Garden of Eden' was just a case of me using up an idea rather than any kind of commercial urgency," he says. "For myself, *Pilgrim* has always been one of those 'half a good idea' stories, which are more frustrating than the outright failures – you can write those ones off. I felt I'd wasted a good character and decent supporting cast on a duff setting, which goes back to my map of the ocean floor. As I twigged only after I'd gotten started, if you drain away the ocean what you end up with is... a desert. Which means a post-apocalyptic story that looks pretty much like any other, and you can scatter all the whale skeletons and shipwrecks that you like, but at the end of the day a desert is a desert is a bloody boring desert."

It's not hard as a reader to believe that Ennis is being unduly harsh on a story which took some of his sharpest traits as a writer – namely his sublime understanding of the flawed male character and a capacity for violence bordering on the horrific – and turned them up to eleven. Yet arguably his discarding of the series was also the making of it, as "Garden of Eden" concluded in brutal, slate-wiping fashion, with the slimmest of green shoots offering hope for humanity's redemption. All eight issues were collected by Dynamite in 2009, and arguably sit alongside many of Ennis and Ezquerra's finest works.

...SO THEN THINGS STARTED TO GET KIND OF SCARY, AN' DAD AN' SOME OTHERS DECIDED TO START OVER DOWN IN THE CANYONS.
WELL, THEY GOT THEMSELVES A MITE OFF-COURSE, BOY. YOU WERE HEADED DUE SOUTH WHEN I PICKED UP YORE TRAIL.
HOW YOU MEAN, KIND OF SCARY?
I DUNNO. IT--
IT WAS LIKE THE SETTLEMENT JUST WENT BAD. THERE WASN'T ENOUGH FOOD TO GO AROUND, AN' PEOPLE WERE KILLIN' EACH OTHER OVER CANS OF SOUP, AN' NO ONE TRUSTED ANYONE
HIS SKIN SO YELLOW?
HUH?
EATIN' HUMAN FLESH TURNS YORE SKIN YELLOW. FIRST SIGN O' CANNIBALISM.
HOW D'YOU KNOW A THING LIKE THAT, MISTER?
THERE WAS EVEN ONE MAN THEY SAID ATE HIS FAMILY...
I JUST KNOW.

"Given that the lead character had pretty much damned himself, what with all the people he'd killed or gotten killed, I felt that the ending he got was the one he deserved," says Ennis now. "Which isn't to say I didn't like the Pilgrim or enjoy writing him – his total inability to compromise or see other points of view was good fun, as was his sheer lethality once he got going. But once he'd had his moment of clarity and turned his back on the god that had led him to do so much harm, the only appropriate fate I could see for him was self-sacrifice. I think he would have agreed with me there." CH

Above: A touch of The Man With No Name, a dash of Jonah Hex, a hint of Strontium Dog , but the Pilgrim is still a memorable character



FRANKENSTEIN IMAGES © DARK HORSE COMICS

MASTER OF HORROR

A TRIBUTE TO BERNIE WRIGHTSON

KARL STOCK REMEMBERS THE FAN FAVOURITE WITH A TASTE FOR THE DARK AND MACABRE, NEVER ENTIRELY AT HOME IN THE SUPERHERO-DOMINATED MAINSTREAM

"Each time I finished a drawing, I remember feeling a bit let down," Bernie Wrightson told writer Steve Niles in 2012, talking about his illustrations for Marvel's 1983 edition of *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. "If I'd only worked a little harder I could nail it exactly. Several times I'd start a new version of an already finished piece, or even an incomplete one, trying and trying again to get it just right."

Seven years in the making, the book stands as testimony to Wrightson's painstaking detail work and his lifelong love of horror. The artist died in March at the age of 68. He had retired just two months earlier from creating art and touring the convention circuit following complications from surgery for a brain tumour.

His reputation was high and his achievements many. In the late 1960s and early '70s, inspired by a meeting with his hero Frank Frazetta, Wrightson became a prolific contributor to the horror lines of Marvel, DC and Warren Publishing; in 1971, with writer Len Wein, he co-created Swamp Thing for DC Comics. In 1975, he and a group of fellow comic artists set up the Manhattan-based illustration collective The Studio; in 1983 he illustrated a comics adaptation of Stephen King's *Creepshow*, leading to a number of other collaborations with King.

In 1985, Wrightson and writer Jim Starlin created *Heroes For Hope* for Marvel, and its DC follow-up *Heroes Against Hunger* – one-shot, Band Aid era charity jams to raise funds for African famine relief, with contributions from top creators of the day. He returned to Shelley's character for IDW's *Frankenstein Alive, Alive!* in 2012, for which he won a National Cartoonist's Society Award.

Born on 27 October 1948 in the working-class Baltimore suburb of Dundalk, Wrightson grew up in a family of comic readers, although he felt forced to read his beloved EC comics at the newsstand or hide them under the mattress and away from his mother, at the time the line was at the heart of a national moral panic inspired by Dr. Fredric Wertham's anti-comics tract *Seduction Of The Innocent*. At Catholic school (which he disliked strongly) he was always in trouble for drawing EC or Universal monsters on his textbooks.

Between 1964 and 1966 Ballantine books published five collections of old EC comics, while at the same time Warren began publishing

Opposite page: A breathtaking example of the sheer painstaking detail that went into what many regard as Wrightson's masterpiece, *Frankenstein*

Right: The artist was a popular regular on the convention circuit until ill health forced him to curtail his appearances

Below: Besides his affection for horror, Wrightson's Frankenstein projects amply demonstrate his skill with pen and ink.

PHOTO © COREY BOND

the iconic horror comic *Creepy*, and this was where Wrightson's art was first seen – a piece of fan art in a 1966 issue, which bore his name on a tombstone. He later told the magazine *Comic Book Artist* that he was a "complete willing outcast" at the time, staying at home and teaching himself to draw while his friends all built a social life.

Wrightson started out watching television artist John Gnagy's show, and eventually took correspondence courses in illustration with the New York Society of Illustrators' Famous Artists School for a year. In his late teens, he realised "comic artist" was a job and he wanted to do it.

He started attending conventions. At his first he met Frazetta – whose work he loved mainly from his paperback covers – and sold a bunch of his own amateur illustrations. At another con a year later he was introduced to Dick Giordano and Carmine Infantino of DC Comics, who liked his work and soon offered him a job.

"Carmine, who looked like a really big Edward G. Robinson with the cigar and everything, punches me in the arm, puts his arm around me, and says, 'You f*cking kid!'," recalled Wrightson in *Comic Book Artist*. "I didn't know what to make of this because these guys were like Mafia, fast-talking Italian guys. I had never met people like this before!" He was 18 when he met the DC team and he accepted their offer to move to New York, leaving his job as an editorial cartoonist at the *Baltimore Sun*, where he was disenchanted by the lack of actual illustrating. His first assignment was a three-part Nightmaster series written by Denny O'Neill in *Showcase*.

Above left: Like his contemporaries at The Studio, Michael Kaluta, Barry Windsor-Smith and Jeff Jones, Wrightson aspired to take his art beyond comics.

Above: Wrightson developed amoral adventurer Captain Sternn in the late 1970s, and the story was serialised in *Heavy Metal* in 1980. A miniseries was published by Kitchen Sink Press in 1993.

HORROR BOOM

Wrightson froze under the pressure, not ready for the responsibility. Infantino understood and took him off the book. He next contributed to *House Of Mystery*, edited by former EC artist Joe Orlando, drawing a 1969 one-shot story titled "The Man Who Murdered Himself". Orlando was something of an early mentor to Wrightson, and *House Of Mystery* remained one of his main outlets throughout the 1970s.

For DC he drew well-received covers for *House Of Secrets* and one-off interiors for issues of *Batman* and *The Spectre*, among many others. At Marvel his work included lone issues of *Conan The Barbarian*, *Savage Tales* and *Captain Marvel*, and covers for *The Incredible Hulk*, *Tomb of Dracula* and *Werewolf By Night*. His own self-published horror and sci-fi anthology *BadTime Stories* appeared in 1972, and in 1974 he left DC for a time to fulfil a personal ambition working for Warren, contributing to issues of *Creepy*, *Eerie* and *Vampirella*. In these early days he called himself *Berni* Wrightson, to distinguish from an Olympic diver also named Bernie Wrightson, but the "e" was eventually reinstated.

Wrightson preferred to work in black-and-white, with the starkness and edgy contemporary feel of his art apparent whether he was using brushes or pen and ink, while his meticulous style was also

more suited to taking more time over individual covers or issues. It's ironic, then, that what turned him into a comics superstar was a full-colour, bimonthly ongoing series. At a party, writer Len Wein asked him to take on a one-off story for *House Of Secrets* in 1971, the tale of an early 20th-century scientist named Alex Olsen who is killed in a lab accident and resurrected as a shambling swamp creature made of muck and vegetation.

"I had just broken up with a girl at the time and this story really touched that in me, so I just poured my heart and soul into it," Wrightson told *Comic Book Artist*. "We did the story and I pretty much forgot about it. The issue came out and it was pretty much [DC's] best-selling book that month, beating out Superman and Batman." The editorial clamour was to do a monthly Swamp Thing book, with a new character named Alec Holland in an updated 1970s setting. "I was a little sceptical at first and I really needed Len to come and talk me into it. The way we approached it, it was a new thing and a pretty innovative idea."

Swamp Thing made him a star among fandom, winning three Shazam awards and a Comic Fan Art Award at the time, yet after a few issues Wrightson had become tired of some of the scenarios and he left with issue 10. A plan to have him take on a regular series starring The Shadow fell through, leaving only some rough designs, but in the 1980s Alan Moore's revamp only intensified Swamp Thing's cult status. Another character Wrightson co-created (this time with writer Marv Wolfman) also found revived success many years later, as Destiny from *Weird Mystery Tales* #1 was used by Neil Gaiman in *Sandman* in the 1990s.

Top: Wrightson's penchant for horror, influenced by his early taste for EC Comics, is never very far away

Above: Wrightson felt he had found his niche at DC in the horror anthology comics boom of the 1970s

BEYOND COMICS

Teaming with Michael Kaluta, Barry Windsor-Smith and Jeff Jones in a shared Chelsea (NY) loft to form The Studio gave Wrightson a taste of creator-controlled life outside of mainstream comics, and the collective produced an art book to rave reviews in 1979 but soon broke up. From the 1980s onwards much of his work appeared in other media, including *National Lampoon*. He created book illustrations for Stephen King's *The Dark Tower Part V: Wolves of the Calla* and a limited edition of *The Stand*, the cover for Meatloaf's 1981 album *Dead Ringers*, and Hollywood creature designs for successful films including *Ghostbusters* (1984), *Galaxy Quest* (1999) and *Serenity* (2005).

Still, Wrightson never left comics entirely, returning for stories which were more often superheroic in nature. He created Captain Sternn for *Heavy Metal*, and beautifully illustrated *The Amazing Spider-Man: Hooky* graphic novel written by Susan K. Putney, released in 1986. With his close friend Jim Starlin he drew the landmark miniseries *Batman: The Cult* and *The Weird* (both 1988) for DC, as well as *The Incredible Hulk and the Thing: The Big Change* (1987) and *The Punisher: POV* (1991) for Marvel. He illustrated the 1998 *Batman/Aliens* crossover for DC/Dark Horse and a number of horror miniseries with Steve Niles for IDW from 2007 onwards.

His edition of *Frankenstein* was a labour of love on which he worked for no pay for seven years between jobs, and he was dismayed at the time by the lack of effort that was being put into marketing it or even introducing it to bookshops. He was glad to see it released at last by Dark Horse in 2008 in the sumptuous hardcover 25th Anniversary edition it deserved. "When it was all done, I felt that I'd completed a journey," he told Niles. "I had spent a long time pushing the boulder up the hill and I'd finally gotten there... and now I could get on with the rest of my life. I can look at those drawings now with a sense of pride and satisfaction... They were done by someone else, a young artist, unafraid of hard work, obsessed really. Well, all artists are nuts. It's a scientific fact."

Wrightson is survived by his second wife Liz and his two sons with late first wife Michele Wrightson, an underground comic creator herself. He leaves behind a powerful legacy not only of great comic pages and illustrations, but a sense of his belief that artists outside the medium – like the pen-and-ink masters of the early 20th century who inspired him – have much to teach about just how human and how horrifying art can be.

"I'D JUST BROKEN UP AND POURED MY HEART AND SOUL INTO IT"

FOR TREE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW

DAVID BARNETT DIGS DEEP AND TRACES THE ROOTS OF DC'S ERA-DEFINING MUCK MONSTER

IMAGES © DC COMICS 2017

Left: Some mark the dawn of the Bronze Age not at *Conan* but *Swamp Thing* #1.

Above: In the second series, in the hands of artist Steve Bissette, things started turning... well, a little weird

Below: The first issue of the second series in 1982 gave little indication of the direction in which it would evolve

If ever there was a character who encapsulated the modern era of comic books, it's Swamp Thing. You might fairly point to *The Dark Knight Returns*, or *Watchmen*, or a number of miniseries or landmark issues that served as the catalyst in the 1980s for the reinvention of mainstream superhero comics as a more fulfilling and mature medium. But none of it would have happened without Swamp Thing.

Not that you'd know it from his roots (pun intended, of course). Swamp Thing was created by writer Len Wein and artist extraordinaire Bernie Wrightson for a one-off story in 1971 in DC horror anthology title *House Of Secrets*. It was a pretty typical non-canon creature feature: scientist Alex Olsen is apparently killed when his lab is sabotaged by a colleague who has designs on Olsen's wife, Linda. Rather than die, however, he is transformed by the chemicals from the lab as he sinks into the waters of the swamp where the secret lab is situated, rising again as a muck-encrusted monster.

And there the Swamp Thing story might have ended, but for a very positive response from readers which prompted DC's management team to entreat Wein and Wrightson to reboot their own story the following year for an ongoing Swamp Thing series.

Wein and Wrightson updated the story to contemporary 1970s DC continuity and retold the origin, this time with the scientist, Alec Holland, working in secrecy in the swamp on a "bio-restorative" formula which bad guys want to get their hands on. But the story is broadly the same: after an explosion at the lab, Holland plunges, half-dead, into the muddy waters, where his own experiment – designed to restore plant-life to arid landscapes – works on his body to transform him into "a muck-encrusted mockery of a man," the Swamp Thing.

Muck monsters have always been a bit of a thing in comics. Marvel had Man-Thing, who debuted in 1971 with an origin on remarkably similar lines to Swamp Thing, and both owed a debt to the Golden Age character The Heap, who first lumbered into view as far back as 1942.

But Swamp Thing always seemed slightly different. A truly tragic character, his

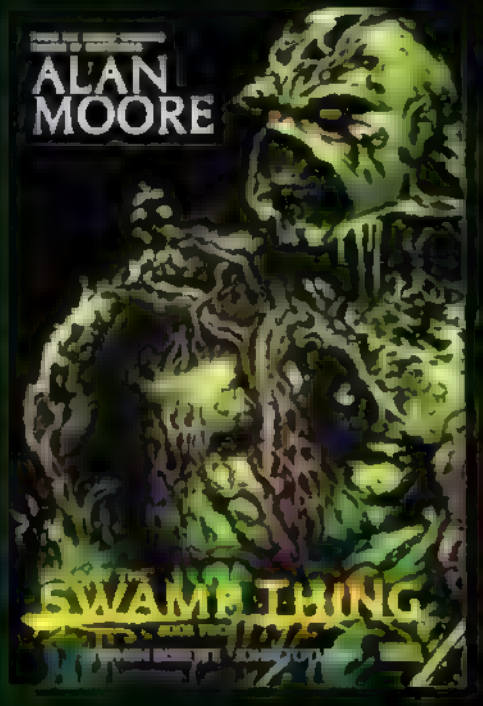
raison d'être was to wreak vengeance on the bad guys who caused his transformation and killed his wife, while at the same time searching for the means to restore himself to human form.

That first series ran for 24 issues, just over half of them written by Wein and the first ten illustrated by Wrightson. In that time they laid the basis for the Swamp Thing mythos and introduced characters who would come more to the fore in subsequent years, most notably the evil Dr Anton Arcane and his niece Abigail, and federal agent Matthew Cable, who believed that the Swamp Thing was responsible for the death of missing scientist Alec Holland.

But two years in, the sheen was going off Swamp Thing and sales were low. The book was cancelled. But then the muck-monster got another outing with the second series of his ongoing title in 1982... in which comics history would be made.

DOING HIS THING

The return of Swamp Thing wasn't random, but was built around the release of the Wes Craven movie in the same year. Starring Ray Wise as Alec Holland, and Adrienne Barbeau as a kind of composite of a gender-flipped Matthew Cable and Abby Arcane, the movie got surprisingly good notices for a comic book adaptation of that period. The movie plot was actually adapted back into comic form for a Swamp Thing annual in the new run, but the ongoing

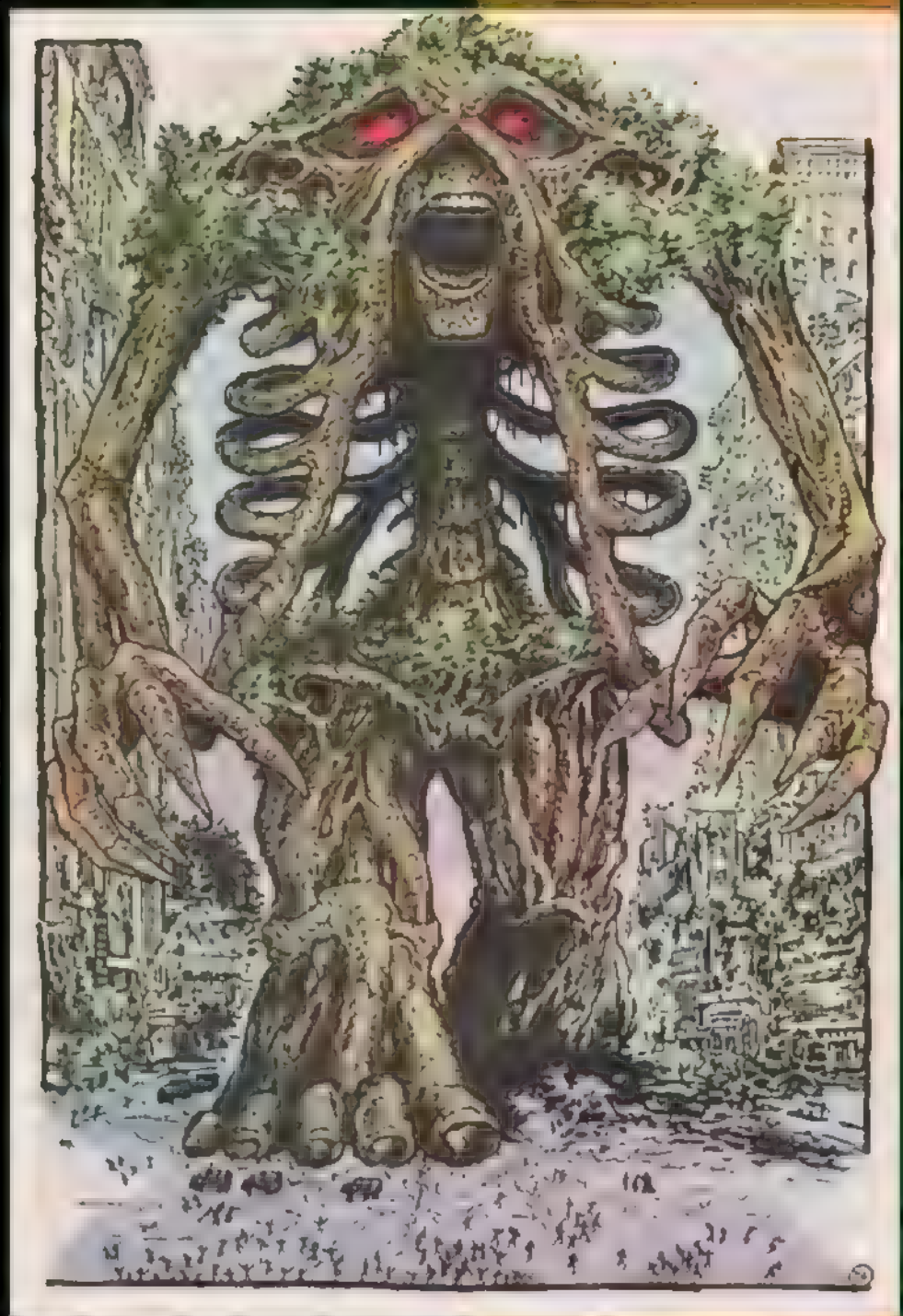


series proper was written by Canadian-born Martin Pasko, who set up Swamp Thing as a kind of modern-day legend, a ghost story haunting the Louisiana swamps. The art was handled by Tom Yeates but towards the end of Pasko's tenure he was replaced by two young artists, Stephen R. Bissette and John Totleben, who had already ghosted some uncredited pages for Yeates.

Pasko left with issue 19, so the book's editor, Len Wein himself, needed a replacement. Wein thought of a British comics writer who was pretty much unknown in the States. His name was Alan Moore.

Moore had already earned a formidable reputation on British weekly *2000 AD* and monthly *Warrior*, where he would create with artist David Lloyd the dystopian political thriller *V For Vendetta* and revitalise obscure British superhero Marvelman. Wein knew of this work, but Moore didn't know Wein and initially hung up on the American, thinking the call was a prank.

Wein called him back and persuaded him, but Moore was unknown to the US audience and untested on a full-length monthly American title, so it



was something of a gamble putting him on Swamp Thing. Still, the book was heading for likely cancellation otherwise – perhaps there was nothing to lose. And, as it turned out, there was everything to gain.

It's no exaggeration to say that Alan Moore on Swamp Thing was one of those pivotal moments in comics history. Without that marriage of writer and character, it's arguable that there would have been no Vertigo imprint further down the line, perhaps no Watchmen or the later DC reimaginings in Moore's own astonishing body of work, and certainly no John Constantine. Moore was about reinvention, about turning things on their heads, about confounding expectations, and with his run on Swamp Thing he did that in spades.

Above: Several artists and writers have taken Swamp Thing in mind-bending directions over the years.

Above, far right: Volume 2 of the start of Alan Moore's landmark run.

Above right and below: Wein and Wrightson's original series drew its own affection for classic horror tropes.

Moore hit the ground running in his first issue, number 20 of the second series, aptly entitled "Loose Ends," and then in issue 21, "The Anatomy Lesson," performed his rather neat trick of ripping up everything and starting again while still honouring what had gone before.

REDEFINING

The continuity thus far had maintained that Swamp Thing was a transformed Alec Holland. Moore didn't hold with this and had the creature – "killed" at the climax of his first issue – on the autopsy table, with the knife being wielded by Jason Woodrue, the Floronic Man. The post mortem revealed that Swamp Thing's body had never been human, and was instead a crude imitation of a human form fashioned by swamp vegetation that had absorbed Alec Holland's essence during his origin story. Holland had indeed died; the Swamp Thing only thought it was him.

This set the stage for a re-defining of the whole Swamp Thing mythos, which would set this newly identified being on a voyage of self-discovery that would, in turn, eventually become a journey through the dark heart of America itself.

The run introduced The Green, the network that connected all plant life on Earth, of which Swamp Thing was the champion, as appointed by the enigmatic Parliament of Trees. Moore began to cleave Swamp Thing closely to DC's supernatural history, bringing in characters such as Jason Blood (alias Etrigan the Demon), Deadman and the Phantom Stranger. He recast Anton Arcane as a demonic presence and his niece Abby as Swamp Thing's lover, most notably in the rather beautiful "Rites of

"RIPPING EVERYTHING UP WHILE HONOURING WHAT WENT BEFORE"

AND I WONDER HOW MUCH IT WILL HAVE SEEN?
YOU UH
ARE YOU, UH, STILL INTELLIGENT?
CAN YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT I M SAYING?
UH THE FILE ON YOU
UH LOOK I DON T KNOW IF YOU VE READ THAT FILE THERE, BUT
YES I HAVE READ THE FILE
LIKE IT?
18

[issue 34] in which she
s of a hallucinogenic
own from Swamp
body to temporarily
wamp Thing's state of
The Green.

NG WING

masterstroke was the
n of John Constantine,
may-care British
n who would, of
go on to star in his
le, *Hellblazer*, and
a fan-favourite fixture
DC universe and the
mature readers line,
ntine was introduced
Swamp Thing come to
with his own existence,
and the maverick magic
practitioner sent the swamp
elemental out into the world
in the "American Gothic"
storyline to encounter the
horrors of the darkest corners
of the DC universe and thus
perhaps come to better
understand himself.

From the start, Moore's run
was controversial. The Comics
Code Authority, responsible
for keeping comic book fun
on the level since the 1950s,
refused to give its seal of
approval to issue 29, which
dealt with Abby suffering
abuse at the hands of her
uncle. DC distributed the
book anyway, and pretty soon
stopped worrying about the
CCA's approval. Which was
just as well as Moore pushed
the envelope, in comics terms,
with increasingly challenging
storylines... Issue 40 even
featured (horror of horrors!)
menstruation, in a story where
"The Curse" of the werewolf
does metaphorical duty for a
woman's monthly "curse".

Moore wrote *Swamp Thing*
for five years, his final issue
being #64, in September 1987.
The comics world had changed
by then, and DC was lauded
for its experimental and
groundbreaking comics such
as Grant Morrison's *Doom
Patrol* and *Animal Man*,
Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*,
and *Hellblazer* itself. These
were the foundations of the
Vertigo line, which Karen
Berger [who'd taken over as
editor of *Swamp Thing* from
issue 25] would midwife into
existence in 1993.

Above left: An iconic cover image by the magnificent Bernie Wrightson.

Above right: Moore's radical reworking in Volume 2 #21, drawn by Bissette, Veitch and Totleben, nears its striking climax.

After Moore, Rick Veitch, who had been pencilling the stories towards the end of the run, took up scripting duties, continuing along a path similar to the one Moore had hacked out of the comics undergrowth. His run might have been most notable for the issue in which he had Swamp Thing inhabit Constantine's body to impregnate Abby, had it not all ended with even greater controversy when DC refused to run the story slated for issue 88, in which Jesus appears on the cross.

After a rapid reorganisation the team of Doug Wheeler and Pat Broderick took over the title, followed by horror writer Nancy A. Collins. Between them they portrayed the birth of Swamp Thing and Abby's half elemental, half human daughter Tefe. But there was another pivotal moment on the way, as after Collins DC brought in Grant Morrison to co-write a new start for

"GODLIKE CHAMPION OF EARTH WITH HUMAN TRAITS SUBSUMED..."

Swamp Thing. And Morrison's partner in crime was another new UK writer getting his big break in comics thanks to the muck monster, Mark Millar.

EVER RECURRING

After a four-issue bedding-in period, Morrison left Millar to it, who created a wide-screen vista for Swamp Thing, pitting him against Earth's other elementals – stone, water, fire, etc – eventually making him into a godlike champion of Earth whose human traits were fast becoming subsumed beneath his elemental power. Millar wrote *Swamp Thing* until issue 177... when DC cancelled it once again.

But you can't keep a good elemental down. Swamp Thing would be back, and he would have some of the biggest and brightest names in comics writing his adventures. Brian K. Vaughan handled the new series that began in 2001, with art by Roger Petersen and Giuseppe Camuncoli, which turned the focus on Swamp Thing and Abby's daughter Tefe. Andy Diggle wrote the first arc in a new series that began in 2004, which ran for 29 issues, and was followed by Swamp Thing playing a major role in the DC crossover Brightest Day.

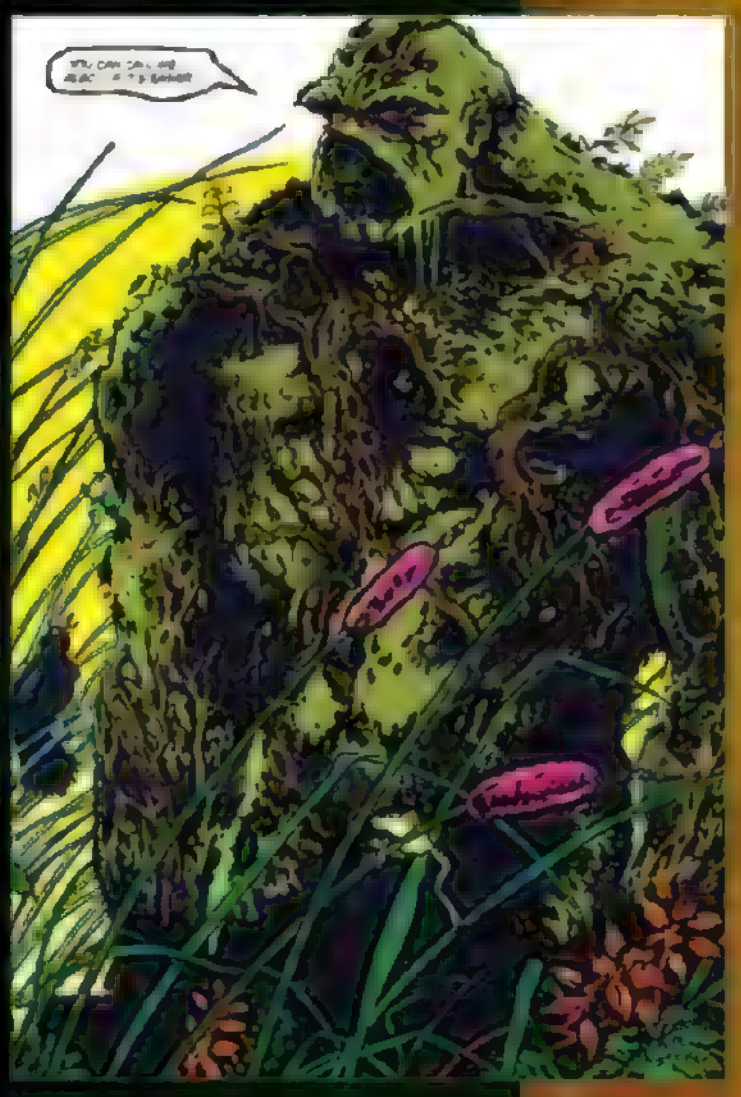
When DC rebooted its line with the New 52 initiative in 2011, Swamp Thing again got a new title, which brought Animal Man into the mythos and had Swamp Thing battling old foe Jason Woodrue, the Floronic Man, for the right to be The Green's champion.

And now, in DC's latest Rebirth iteration, Swamp Thing has made tentative, creeping moves back into the continuity, in the pages of the rebooted John Constantine title, *Hellblazer*.

Ever since his creation in 1971, Swamp Thing has been the hardy perennial of the DC universe. Whether he will get his own series again, or return to the giddy heights of the Alan Moore days, perhaps only the Parliament of Trees knows. And, as ever, they're not telling...

Below left: The plant creature version best known to many long-term fans.

Below right: An unusual interpretation by Bissette with inking by distinctive stylist Alfredo Alcala.



SUBSCRIBE TO

COMIC HEROES

COMICS FOR EVERYONE

ENJOYING THE RETURN OF COMIC HEROES? SAVE MONEY AND NEVER MISS AN ISSUE AGAIN!
SUBSCRIBE TODAY AND GET ALL FOUR ISSUES PER YEAR FROM AS LITTLE AS £15

CHOOSE YOUR PACKAGE

SUBSCRIBERS GET EXCLUSIVE COVERS!

PRINT

EVERY ISSUE DELIVERED TO YOUR DOOR
DAYS BEFORE IT REACHES THE SHOPS

ONLY **£25** PER YEAR

DIGITAL

INSTANT DIGITAL ACCESS ON
YOUR iOS DEVICES

ONLY **£15**
PER YEAR

GET THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

PRINT + DIGITAL

BEST VALUE

EVERY NEW ISSUE IN PRINT AND ON iOS

EXCLUSIVE SUBSCRIBER ONLY COVERS FOR YOUR PRINT MAGAZINE

NEVER MISS AN ISSUE WITH DELIVERY TO YOUR DOOR AND YOUR DEVICE

ENJOY THE BIGGEST SAVING AND BEST VALUE FOR MONEY

INSTANT DIGITAL ACCESS WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

ONLY **£31** PER YEAR

SUBSCRIBE TO COMIC HEROES TODAY

VISIT myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/CHSUB

Or call **0344 848 2852** and quote **COHP1V** for print, **COHP1X** for bundle or **COHP1W** for digital.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS Prices and savings quoted are compared to buying full priced UK print and digital issues. You will receive 4 issues in a year. If you are dissatisfied in any way you can write to us at Future Publishing Ltd, 3 Queensbridge, The Lakes, Northampton, NN4 7BF, United Kingdom or call us on UK: 0344 848 2852, Overseas: +44 344 848 2852 to cancel your subscription within 14 days of purchase. Your subscription is for the minimum term specified and will expire at the end of the current term. Payments are non-refundable after the 14 day cancellation period unless exceptional circumstances apply. Your statutory rights are not affected. Prices correct at point of print and subject to change. For full terms and conditions please visit myfavmag/terms. Offer ends 17/07/2017

CRIMINAL MINDS

IT'S THE SAUCIEST, MOST SUBVERSIVE CULT COMIC ON THE STANDS. **WILL SALMON** MEETS **MATT FRACTION** AND **CHIP ZDARSKY**, THE CREATORS OF *SEX CRIMINALS*...

One of Image's boldest, quirkiest books has also become one of its biggest. *Sex Criminals* – the cheerfully horny comedy about Suzie and Jon, a couple who discover that they can freeze time when they orgasm, and promptly use that ability to rob banks – is both as filthy as you'd expect with that premise, and also tender and nuanced.

As the book has grown in scope, other characters with diverse powers have emerged, as have the repressive Sex Police, who have become the bane of our heroes' lives. And while the premise sounds wild, the book has dug deep into the minds of its characters and tackled issues of mental health in a sincere, funny way. You come for the sex and stay for the characters and hilarious gags. As book four has recently begun, we sat down with Fraction and Zdarsky...

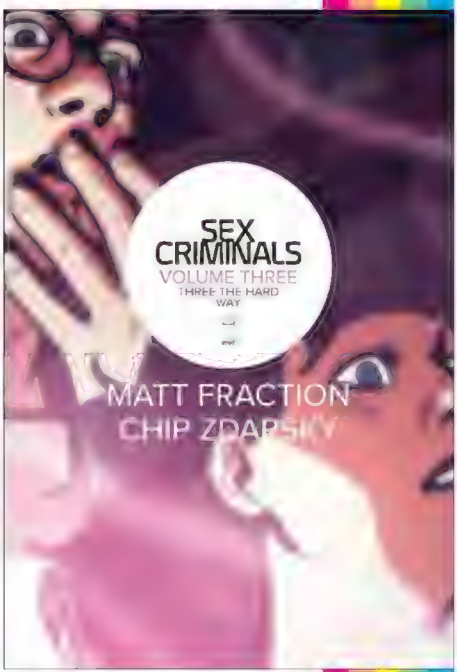
Comic Heroes: So... volume four. What's the theme this time?
Matt Fraction: It's like it says on the first cover: goals. The characters are figuring out what they want, both for themselves and within their relationships with each other and their relationships with society. We're reaching the end of the second act. This is the characters figuring out how far they're willing to go to get what they want, if they even know what they want. So there's a lot of internal drama. There's a lot of personal stuff. There's a lot of relationship stuff. But at the same time, we've pushed the "criminal" part of the comic forward, and we see the Sex Police become more aggressive. All the stakes get raised.

CH: With the new issues it feels like you're bringing the story back to Jon and Suzie again...
MF: Yeah, absolutely. They're always the centre of the book. It's just that sometimes we can look at other things. In fact, I think Chip and I started to miss Jon and Suzie, too. So we're going to start doing annuals to both bridge the gap between arcs and give us a chance to meet other characters apart from Jon and Suzie. There's a really big world we've built and imagined, but pages are finite. You can only get so far away from your core cast and your core story before things start to feel adrift.

CH: Will we be meeting any new characters with sex powers?
MF: My most favourite – and Chip's *least* favourite – comes in our next issue.
CHIP ZDARSKY: Oh God, I hate that character so much.

CH: Really? Why?
CZ: There's a few reasons, but I don't want to spoil anything. There's an element of it that I have to draw over and over again that's so gross, but in a restrictive gross way. I love the character. I hate the power.

CH: Do you have a big list of these different powers, like >



Above right: The latest series makes a point of filling newcomers in.

Below: Double-entendres never very far away

Below left: For all the rude bits, the series has always been very much character-focused

Above: Like all the best creator owned titles, *Sex Criminals* gives its writer and artist the opportunity to enjoy themselves and often throw in background details and little bits of business just for fun

sexual X-Men mutations?

MF: Yeah! That's one of the things we'll get to with the idea of the annuals. There's other characters we could meet, but it would just take momentum away from the core story. But we still want to tell these stories. My mission is now to make Chip love this character, in spite of how much he hates the character. I think it's a challenge.

CZ: Drawing the character is fun because he's like a big, kind of dumb, Will Ferrell style character. I actually enjoy drawing him, and I think the story that Matt's crafted for him is pretty fantastic.

CH: This new character, is he stranger than the anime sex demon dude? Because that was pretty wild...!

MF: He's based on an actual dude. We call him the Little Man.

CH: You mentioned that this is the end of Act 2. Does that mean you've got a fixed end point for the series in mind? Is that coming up or still way off?

MF: It's a way off. But yeah, there's a beginning and a middle and an end, for sure. This is really the story of Jon and Suzie and whatever their "ever after" is. When we get there, we'll get there. But there's also a structure to it. There's a plan to it. This is the second act.

CZ: There's always the option to keep it open ended, but I think that might be not as satisfying for the reader. It's nice to have a plan and be able to visualise the end point and know where you've got to be by a certain time.

MF: And the whole joy of publishing through Image is, you escape the Marvel or DC thing of the perpetual second act. *Spider Man* comics will never end. *Batman* will never end. We have a beginning and a middle and an ending. That makes it a different kind of story and a different kind of comic and a different kind of experience to create and read.

CZ: *Spider Man* might end, because I'm writing it now. So there's that.

MF: Oh, Chip! I came up with a good character for you. He's a super powered theatre critic – The Culture! He has little suede elbow patches and a monocle.

CZ: Every once in a while, Matt will text me random Marvel ideas that could never be published. And I can't tell if he's doing it in order to get me fired or just to point out how stupid our jobs are.

MF: There's no "off" position on the genius switch. He doesn't need these ideas anymore, so I'm giving them to you. Like the Man Spider a spider with the proportionate speed and strength of a man. It's basically a spider that drives a car.

CH: You guys push the meta elements quite far. Will that continue in this volume?

> "THIS IS THE STORY OF JON AND SUZIE AND WHATEVER THEIR 'EVER AFTER' IS, BUT THERE IS A PLAN"

Left: Stylish, highly designed covers have been a feature right from the start

Right: Chip and Matt get a cameo as Volume 3 gets a bit meta-fictional

MF: Inasmuch as we ever have. Putting us in the book took it far. But whether it's the Post-It notes in volume 1 or the characters taking narration back and forth from each other in volume 2; there's something very base-level when you're dealing with a comic book about characters who freeze time in a medium where time, by nature, is frozen. The joke is, it's comics – it's all frozen time. I think it's just keeping with the spirit of the book.

CZ: Whereas some comics might break the fourth wall once in a while, I think what we do is break the fourth wall but we're sitting next to the reader. It's not doing it just for the reader; we're doing it for us as well, if that makes sense.

CH: The book deals with mental health as much as with sex. Why was that important to include?

MF: Chip adds all that stuff, and I have to letter it. What the fuck is going on?

CZ: A true partnership.

MF: I feel like if you could boil the book down to a motif, it's: "Yes, but not like that". It's called *Sex Criminals*, but not like that. It's a sex comic, but it's not sexy. It's not prurient. It's not designed to arouse or titillate. It's really a romance comic. It's a relationship comic. It was a chance to talk about the stuff and write about the stuff in a way I hadn't seen before, at least in comics. And I think... I don't know, it's important.

CZ: I think also, once the comic became more about relationships, that's a huge thing in relationships: introducing your issues to your partner. So many people have either severe cases of things or minor cases of things, but it's still usually something you keep from someone on the second date. But as it goes on, it becomes part of a relationship – you need to explore that.

MF: Yeah, that's exactly right. My wife pointed out that me and Chip's relationship with the book charts Jon and Suzie's relationship with each other. It's like: "Oh look! It's going to be a relationship. It's going to last for a while. Oh shit – what are we doing? Who are you really? What do we want out of this? What are we here for?" We really thought it was going to be four issues. We thought Image would do the >

"WE REALLY THOUGHT IT WOULD BE FOUR ISSUES AND THAT WOULD BE THAT"

ree, and we would pay for rth and beg them to collect d sell 1,100 copies, and ve made our funny little And that would be that. But there's some kind of g you can do between our e relationship with the nd Jon and Suzie's nship with one another. ope they make it as a then...

MF: Well, if one of them wouldn't mouth off so goddamn much.

CZ: I'm so sorry. Please don't leave me.

CH: How do you guys actually collaborate? Is it lots of email, lots of Skype?

CZ: Yeah, the first issue especially. In the first few, there was a lot more back and forth because we were trying to figure out the whole world of it. We'd have phone calls that were a bit more general about our own sexual histories and feelings on things and what we should be doing. After that, we ended up in a bit more of a routine. Basically, once an issue, Matt and I usually get on the phone. Matt will tell me what's coming up, and I'll give my two cents. But it's primarily Matt driving everything. I still enjoy the feeling of withholding all the artwork until it's done, as a surprise to Matt.

MF: I really try to wait until it's all finished, so I can just take it all in. It's my favourite thing; I get to be the first person to read *Sex Criminals*.

CZ: I have the thing too, like when Matt's working on the script, he'll sometimes text me bits of it. I love it, but there's also a part of me that's like, "I want to get it all in the one chunk. But these are so funny, I never want the bits and pieces of it to stop."

MF: Yeah. It's really a comic that I write to make Chip laugh. I think it's a comic that Chip draws to make me laugh. Everything else is gravy. Literally everything else.

MF: I remember the issue where Jon gets his heart broken and is crying in the movie theatre. I was on an airplane. I kept my phone on longer than I should have to download the PDF. So I'm reading it on my phone, which is a terrible way to read a comic, and I'm zooming into each panel, and there's a shot of a guy having sex in a car. It's just a dude's butt and his balls. And it's just so lovingly rendered, for no other reason than: I'm going to see this and laugh, so Chip's going to take however long it takes to draw it.

A lazy artist would have drawn a handprint and made it look like there was fog in the windows, or maybe two feet. But no, Chip just went full grundle.

Above: *Sex Criminals* won the respected Eisner Award for Best New Series in 2014

Above right: It's a sex comedy and a crime thriller, but Suzie is at its heart either way

CH: You put in a lot of sight gags. What are your favourites?

CZ: At some point, it becomes so automatic that it's even harder for me to remember. "Obamacore, softcore and hardcore." That's the one that still makes me chuckle.

MF: My favourite kinds of jokes are the ones where you're clearly at the end of your rope. The jokes where I can tell that you hate yourself for deciding to do it, but you're not letting yourself quit. Like, one of the sex toys is called "Just Half A Tit – Why Not?" The ones that are both funny and a cry for help are my favourites.

CZ: There's one where Ana's reading a newspaper. It must be the classifieds section. I knew even as I was putting these jokes in, they weren't going to be seen. But I basically created a dozen different job listings for the classifieds pages. Even if you zoomed in, you wouldn't be able to see them.

Right: Suzie and Jon's ability gives a new meaning to "afterglow".

Below: The series has introduced more characters with sex-related abilities

CH: It's obviously working – it's got a huge following. I guess you didn't anticipate that?

MF: Who would anticipate this? Anyone who says they would anticipate it is lying. "Of course, I knew the book with all the dicks was going to be huge."

CH: The letters page feels like a place where you guys can be really open with your readers. Does it ever feel exposing?

MF: Yeah. I mean, I'm wildly unqualified for most of it. I can speak from experience, and I can speak from a sense of morality. But I'm not a sex therapist. There's a suicidal guy who wrote to me once on my blog. I said, "Listen, you're writing to a dude you don't know on a blog. You need help. You need a doctor. You need a medical professional. That's the definition of a cry for help."

What I love is that no matter what the sexuality reflected in our letters, it ties us all together. Asexuals write in with their experience and I'm like, "I get that! I know what that feels like!" It's kind of great. It proves the thesis of the book: we're all alone together, and no matter what your taste or level of experience is, everyone has these same kinds of awkward experiences in life. It's a wonderful reminder about humanity.

CH: It always seems there's a warmth and an acceptance there, which is really heartening.

CZ: Yeah. It's a nice mix of warmth and community and jokes. Half the letters will completely touch my heart, and the other half make me giggle.

CH: Brimping. Discuss.

MF: It's when you have sex with hair.

CZ: There's a couple who went through a few of the poses, and then posted photos on their blog, and then gave me their brimping one at a signing.

MF: You've met?

CZ: Yeah, I've met them. They physically handed me the photo. I've probably got it kicking around here somewhere. You know, full nudity, just going for it. At conventions, we get a lot of fan art and weird things. My favourite – I'm actually holding it right now – is a crochet naked Jon doll, where if you flick the penis up, it lights up.

MF: It's the kind of book we wanted to write, to draw, to spend time on. That's the thing about comics – it's really hard. If mistakes happen, nothing hurts worse. Believe me. You work so hard on these things. But then when we turned it into something we wanted to read, it felt like the book worked for us. But again, we just thought it was going to be four issues – "no one's going to like this but us." So it's nice to have other people be like, "Yeah, this is what I like too. This is what I want. I wanted a dirty romance comic."

BACK TO THE 80S

Kimberley Margaux picks out 10 current comics inspired by the glitz, grit and glamour of the 1980s

Cast your mind back to the 1980s: to the pop and post punk icons, the science fiction and trash fashion. It's a decade that's ebbed back into modern culture over the last few years and some of the punchiest, most vibrant recent comics have been inspired by '80s pop culture. This list isn't definitive but it does illuminate some of the best titles that channel the '80s zeitgeist. From teen cops sent back in time to gangs on blood streaked streets and misfits fighting aliens in suburban towns, it's everything you need to dive into the '80s resurgence.

MISFIT CITY

Writers: Kurt Lustgarten, Kiwi Smith
Artist: Naomi Franquiz
Publisher: BOOM! Studios

The first issue of *Misfit City* is coming out in May, and we're so excited we could squee (not really, though, because that's undignified). We're partly excited because it's created and co-written by Kiwi Smith, who, very cool name aside, wrote cult teen movies like *10 Things I Hate About You* and *Legally Blonde* in the late '90s. If *Misfit City* is anything similar, we can expect a cast of quirky characters and reams of quippy, instantly quotable dialogue.

But we're also really looking forward to the story, which takes inspiration from classic '80s adventure movies like *Indiana Jones*, *The Goonies* and *Stand By Me*. Like these films, it's imbued with a love of mischief, pursuit and the great outdoors. This time, however, the story focuses on a group of teenage girls, who, after finding a map that reveals the destination of pirate treasure, leave their boring hometown to track it down.

With a dream duo like Smith and artist Naomi Franquiz, *Misfit City* could be an indie classic in the making. It looks lighthearted and fun, and Smith's story cherishes her childhood in the '80s playing with girls who weren't afraid to scrape their hands and bloody their knees.

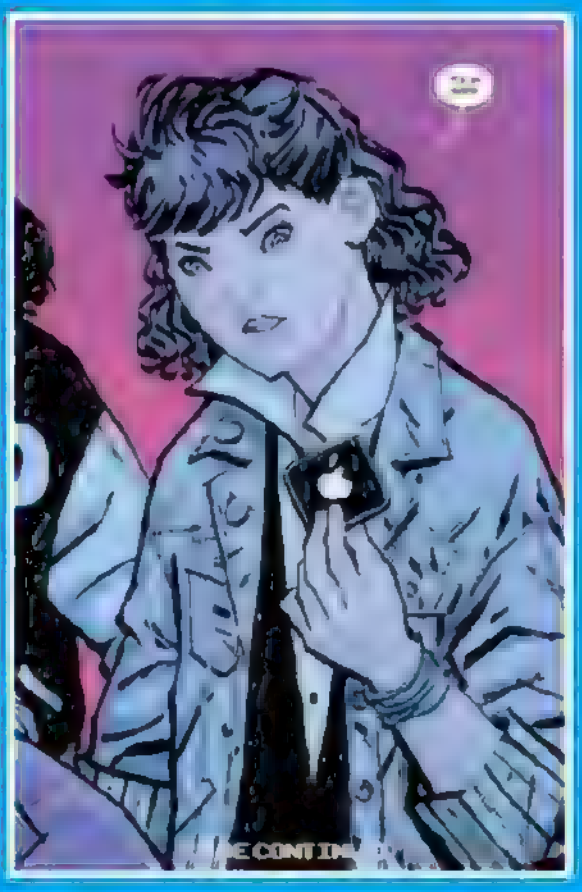
An issue one variant cover, by artist Ester Zejn.

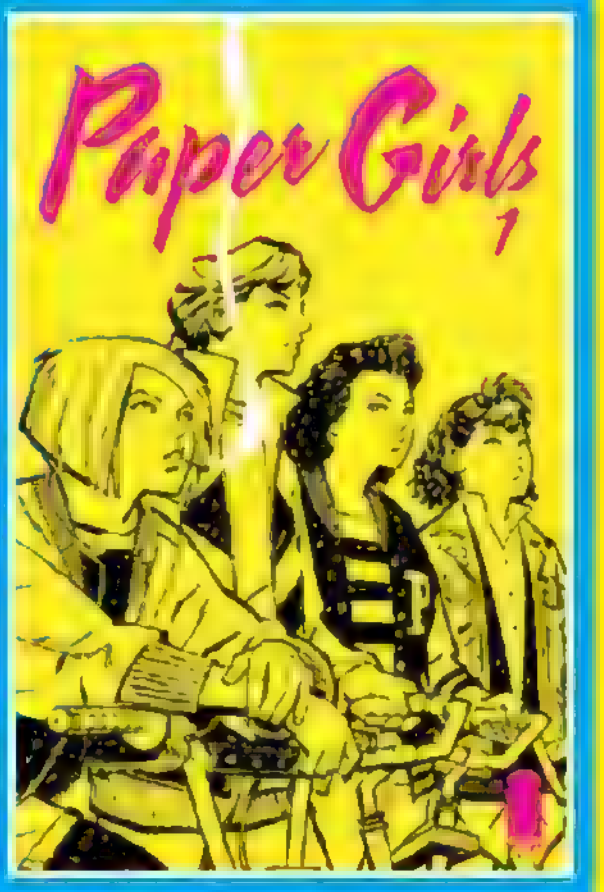
PAPER GIRLS

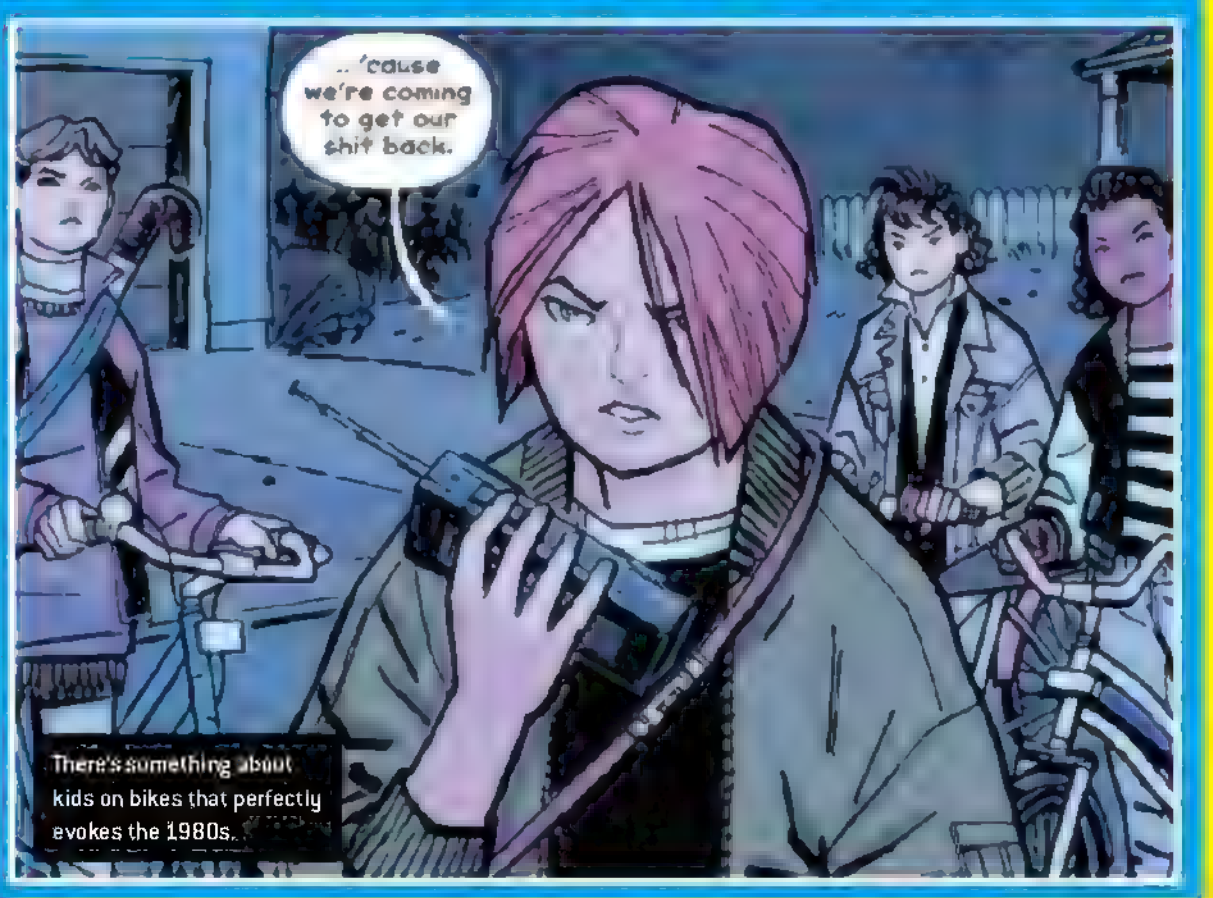
Writer: Brian K. Vaughan
Artists: Cliff Chiang, Matt Wilson
Publisher: Image Comics

This is the series to puzzle over while waiting for the second season of *Stranger Things*. At first glance it feels very similar to the hit Netflix show about a cast of young misfits who have to fight creatures and time travelling. There's the suburban town, a daring statement of teenage outcasts, weirdness and bolder than anything on *Stranger Things*.

Set on Halloween in 1988, *Paper Girls* is a period homage to the '80s and a formative ode to young women. The trends at the centre of the story are the gangs of fantasy: from spiky hair, smoking-eager Mall Rockers, queen bees, there's more than four of 'em in the way they move around their neighbourhood delivering newspapers and trying to escape murderous humanoids, but it's enjoyable nevertheless derivative. *Paper Girls* is a treasure to anyone who grew up in this decade.







JEM AND THE HOLOGRAMS

Writer: Kelly Thompson
Artist: Sophie Campbell (cartoon)
Publisher: IDW Publishing

Pink bubblegum and glitter confetti! How could we write about the best comics in the '80s resurgence and not mention *Jem And The Holograms*? *Jem* was an American cartoon that gained cult status in the mid '80s, about Jerrica Benton, owner of a record label called Starlight Music and her pink-haired singer alterego Jem. It was cute and trashy, embracing gaudy pop music, starry-eyed romance and the superhero schtick of secret identities.

Jem was revived in 2015 by writer Kelly Thompson and artist Sophie Campbell, two superfans who grew up watching the cartoon. Rebooting it for a new audience, *Jem And The Holograms* is more contemporary and adult than its predecessor, combining the show's sticky-sweet aesthetic with themes of sexuality, body image and female friendships.

It's also extremely fun, with arcs like 'Dark Jem', where a rogue artificial intelligence called Silica starts infecting minds, and rival bands who try to steal Jem's limelight. Unfortunately, the series is coming to an end this year, though Thompson has hinted it'll have a comeback in the near future. It may be too cutesy for some, but it's an essential comic for '80s lovers, full of glamour, glitter, fashion and fame; strawberry laces for the soul.

Catch *Jem And The Holograms* before the series ends later this year.

The time-travelling teen policewoman you never knew you needed.

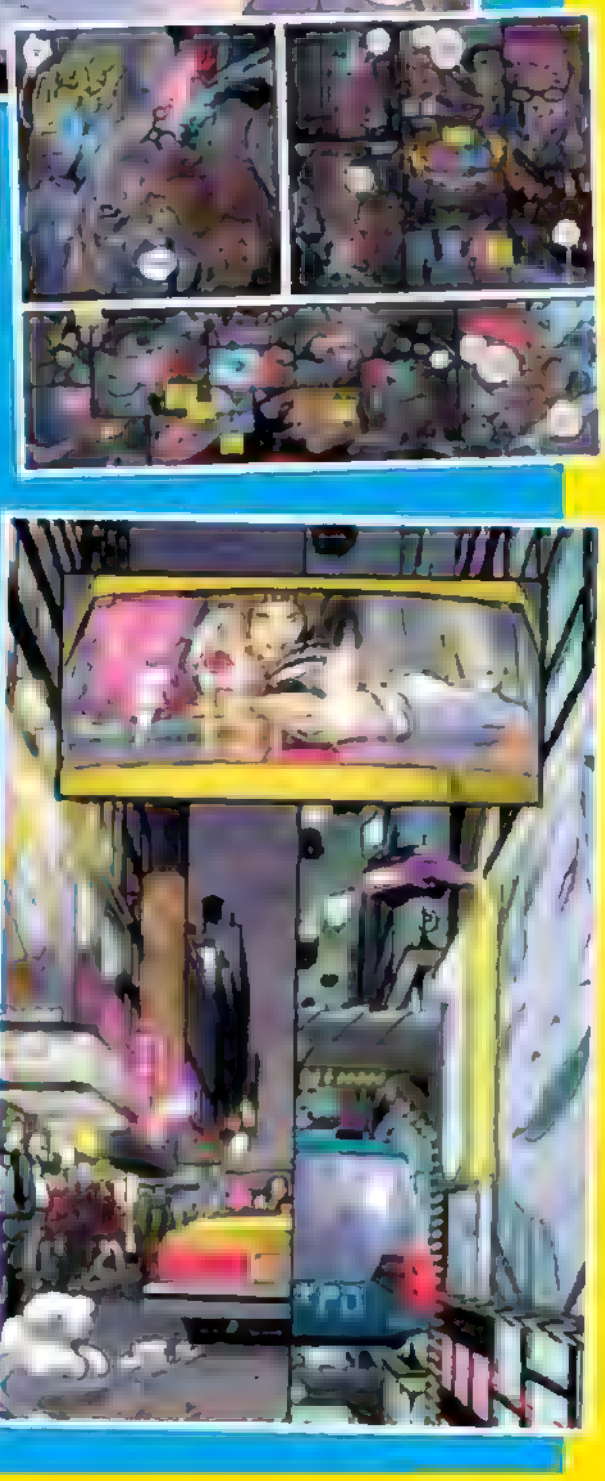
ROCKET GIRL

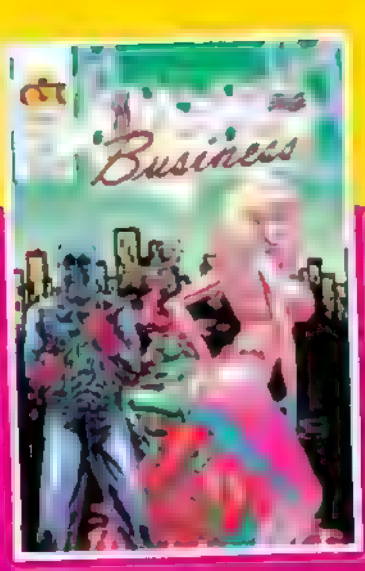
Writer: Brandon Montclare
Artist: Amy Reeder
Publisher: Image Comics

One of the greatest things about '80s science-fiction is watching the clunky, retro-flavoured vision of the future play out, with its jetpacks, flying cars, neon cityscapes and dubious fashion. The creators of *Rocket Girl* embrace the dichotomy of a future that looks vintage, with themes that feel plucked from James Cameron and Paul Verhoeven films.

It's a killer concept: a teenage cop from a high-tech future is sent back to 1980s New York to investigate a megacorporation for crimes against time. It feels like a sci-fi classic, with notes of *The Terminator*'s time travel and *Escape From New York*'s grotty depiction of city living. The comic was almost never made, as writer Brandon Montclare and artist Amy Reeder were stuck in jobs at Marvel and DC. They left to pursue their own project and it paid off, with a successful Kickstarter campaign and backing from Image.

There are currently just seven issues but it is worth the read, as protagonist DaYoung Johansson struggles with coming of age while trying to take down corrupt businessmen and living in a time without laser guns or superpowered tech.





NIGHT BUSINESS

Writer: Benjamin Marra
Artist: Benjamin Marra
Publisher: Fantagraphics

Night Business doesn't mess around when it comes to its love of everything '80s. Calling it bright and bold is an understatement: it's a comic that bleeds neon, set in a sleazy retro-futurist city full of strippers and skyscrapers.

Writer Benjamin Marra is a legend in comic books, with delightfully lurid titles like *Gangster Rap Posse* and *Blades & Lasers* in his back catalogue. *Night Business* is his opus, though, injected with Marra's love of nudity, violence and exploitation. Set in the seedy underbelly of a sprawling city, pimps walk the streets alongside vigilantes, bodacious babes are lapped up by men, and blood and sex can often be seen on the menu.

With its love of sleaze, *Night Business* is an acquired taste, and Marra's depiction of women as prostitutes and strippers is problematic at best, but it's a singular comic. Marra is one of the strangest talents in independent comics, and his vision of the '80s is one of the most depraved. If you think you have the stomach for it, this is a must-read.

Night Business lives and breathes its love of the B-movies, soaps and fashion that defined the decade.

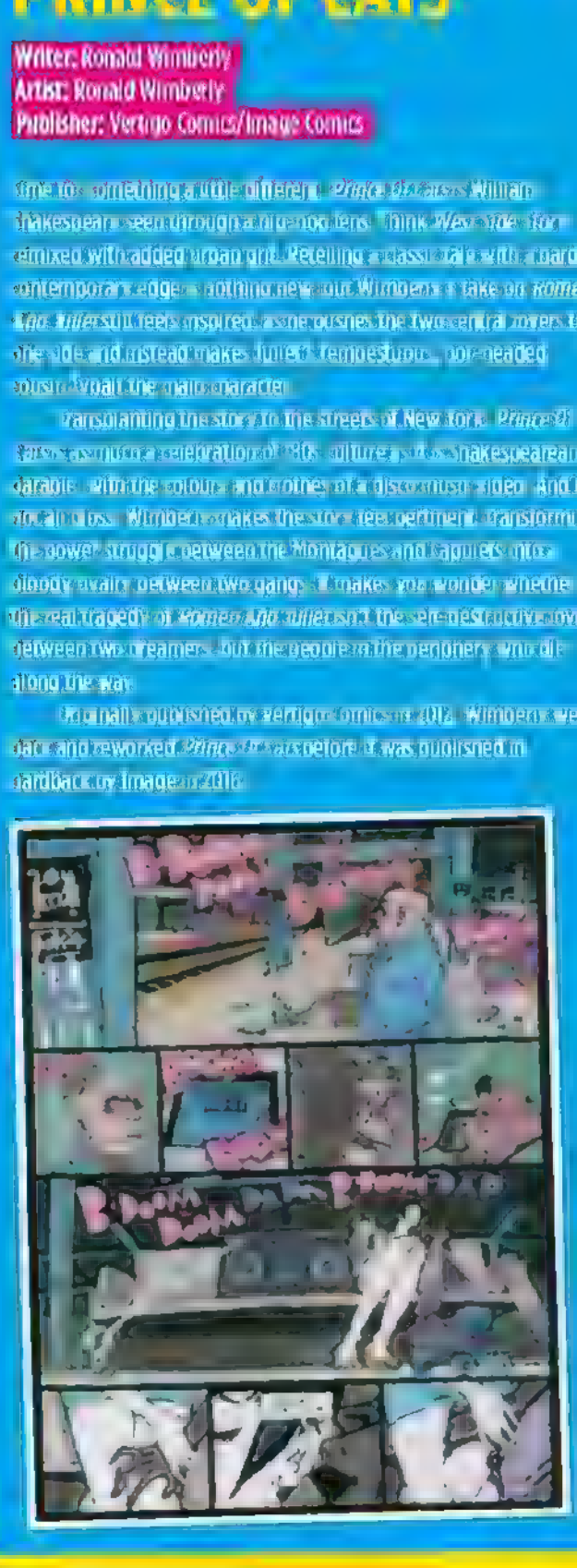
PRINCE OF CATS

Writer: Ronald Wimberly
Artist: Ronald Wimberly
Publisher: Vertigo Comics/Image Comics

Time for something a little different. *Prince of Cats* sees William Shakespeare seen through a hip-hop lens. Think *West Side Story* remixed with added urban grit. Retelling classic tales with a harder contemporary edge is nothing new, but Wimberly's take on *Romeo and Juliet* still feels inspired. He ditches the two central lovers to the side and instead makes Juliet's tempestuous, hot-headed cousin Tybalt the main character.

Transplanting the story to the streets of New York, *Prince of Cats* is a vibrant celebration of '80s culture, with Shakespearean dialogue mixed with the colour and clothes of a disco music video and old-school hip-hop. Wimberly makes the story feel pertinent, transforming the power struggle between the Montagues and Capulets into a bloody rivalry between two gangs. It makes you wonder whether the real tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* isn't the star-crossed love between two dreamers, but the people in the periphery who die along the way.

Originally published by Vertigo Comics in 2012, Wimberly's vibrant and reworked *Prince of Cats* before it was published in hardback by Image in 2016.



Wimberly's colour palette fizzes with bright pops of red and purple.

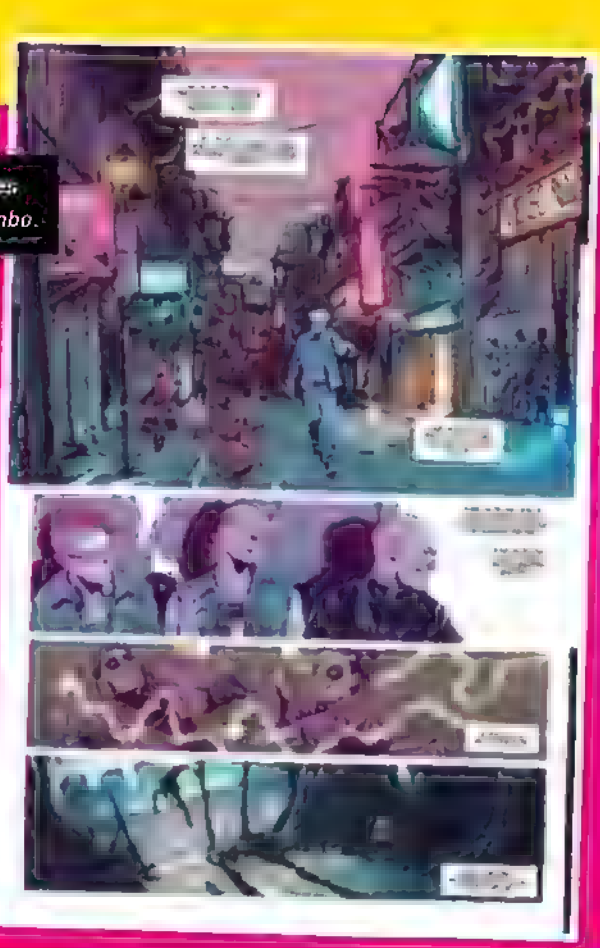
LIMBO

Writer: Dan Watters
Artist: Jaspar Wilngaard
Publisher: Image Comics

Sometimes even the '80s need a little extra flair. In *Limbo*, writer Dan Watters fuses two of his favourite visual styles: the shadowy film noir of the 1940s and the VHS B-movie horror of the '80s. His story exists in the apex of both time periods, following a detective with no memory and the femme fatale who lures him to investigate a dangerous crime lord.

From the outset, it sounds like a generic pulp comic with echoes of neo-noir films like *Memento*, but Watters works to subvert expectations. In a playful twist, Watters brings cassette tapes, hi-tops and other '80s ephemera into the story. The best part is voodoo princess Sandy, who channels her powers through her use of music.

Described by Image Comics as "neon-noir", *Limbo* feels like a film script that bled into a comic book; if John Carpenter, David Cronenberg and David Lynch had been brought back in time to the '40s but wanted to make a film just as bizarre as the '80s allowed. A gorgeous blend of two eras, *Limbo* is weird and alluring, and a love letter to '80s pop culture.



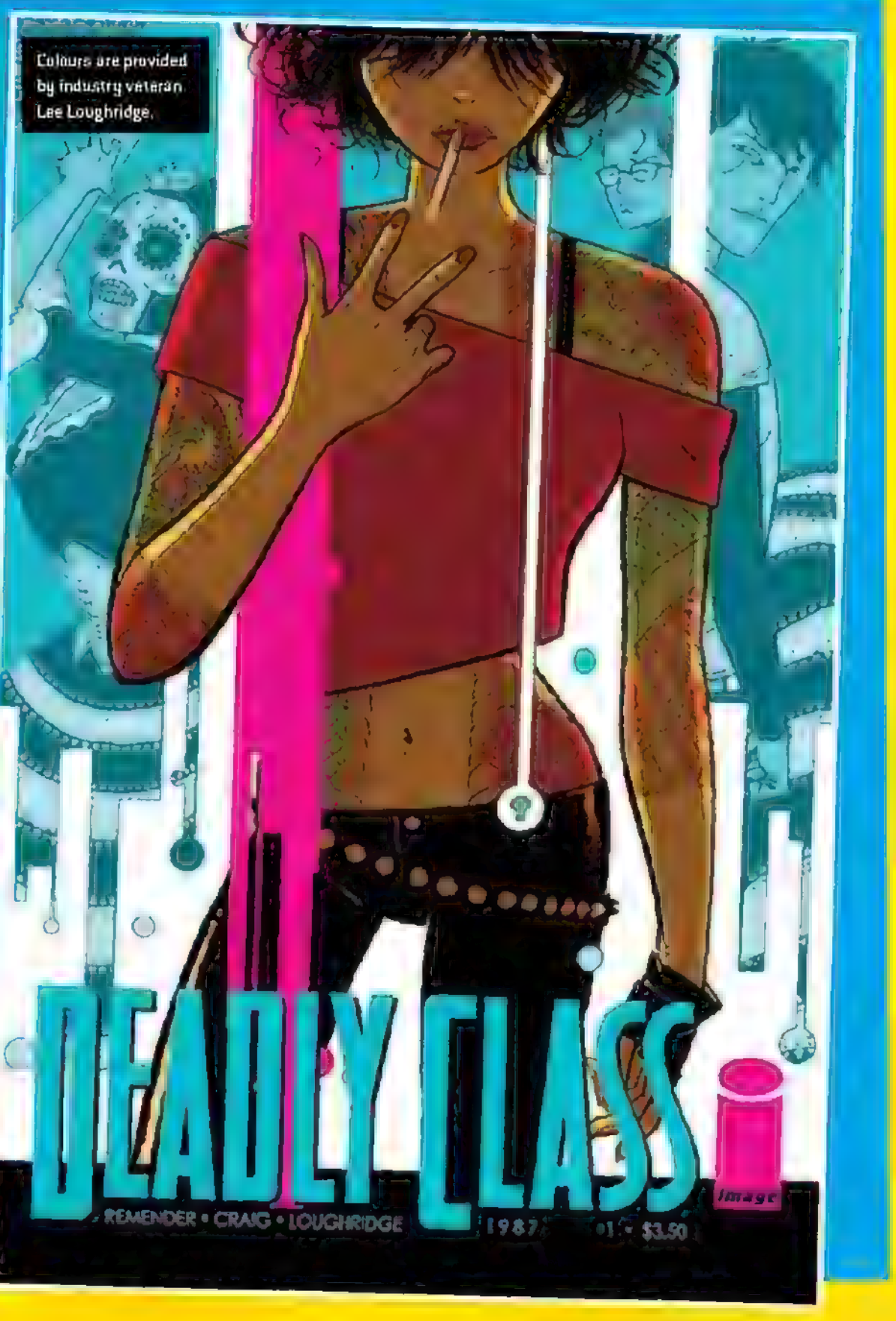
DEADLY CLASS

Writer: Rick Remender
Artist: Wesley Craig
Publisher: Image Comics

High school is a nightmare for most teenagers – but King's Dominion High School could be the worst. Like *School Of Rock* crossed with Mark Millar's *Wanted*, *Deadly Class* is a school where the world's most esteemed crime families send their children to become super assassins. It's a surreal, madcap concept and brilliant because of it.

It's a delight to watch Rick Remender use tropes from '80s high school teen movies such as *The Breakfast Club*, where the unfortunate protagonist gets beaten up by jocks from rival families and ones after the overly popular girl. Remender also plays these characters on a deeper level. The teachers aren't just scary because they're figures of authority, but because they're members of an ancient league of assassins, and you're also anxious about talking to your crush because as well as being beautiful, she's killed more than ten people.

Drawn in an accentuated manga style that brings to mind the blood-soaked classic *Attack On Titan*, *Deadly Class* is a supercharged portrayal of American high school life. All set in an alternate version of the '80s, it's a throwback – sure, but one that never feels old.



PEEPLAND

Writers: Christa Faust, Gary Phillips
Artist: Andrea Camerini
Publisher: Titan Comics

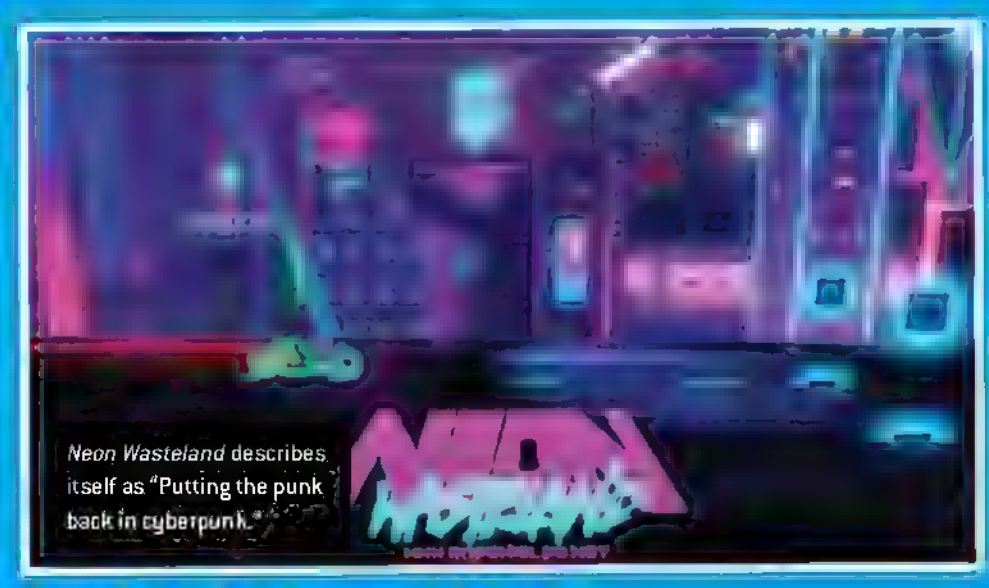
Peepland is a place, and it's one for voyeurs, sadists and sex addicts. The eponymous location of this Titan comic brings readers into the seedy side of '80s American society: a theme park of strip clubs, porno theatres, heroin galleries and crime dens. Writer Christa Faust and artist Andrea Camerini embrace this sleaze with unabashed glee, and create characters who are embroiled in this culture, such as erotic peep booth performer Roxy and her punk-rock lover, Nick Zero, who stumble across the murder of a pornographer.

This is a comic that revels in the raunchier side of the '80s, where sex wasn't readily available on the internet so it poured onto the streets and out of dark corners. Accentuating the fantasy of sex, the comic is always drawn like a Saturday morning cartoon, with soft curves and bright colours, rather than the shadowy, hard-edged style you might expect.

And while sex and death is a popular combination, it's one that's usually shown from a male point of view. This time round, Christa Faust and Andrea Camerini put their own spin on it, creating an empowered heroine who navigates the sleazy streets without letting herself be brought down by them, from the pervert on the corner to the rich dick in City Hall.

AHHH
WHAT THE FUCK?!?
WHY YOU ALWAYS GOTTA BE MESSING WITH ME RIGHT?
NOT NOW
LISTEN, IT'S ABOUT ERP
WELL NO NOT EXACTLY BUT I CAN GET IT AT LEAST A GRAM OR TWO I CAN PROBABLY
SAY YOU WANT YOU WANT SOME PEE TEEN E ALL THAT CHEAP
WHAT THE FUCK?!?

Peepland explores sex and death from a female perspective.



Neon Wasteland describes itself as "Putting the punk back in cyberpunk."

NEON WASTELAND

Writer: Robert Shields
Artist: Robert Shields
Publisher: Self-published

Neon Wasteland is unlike any other title on this list: an interactive webcomic and videogame, created by acclaimed artist Rob Shields, inspired by some of the most vibrant aspects of '80s underground culture: '80s Japanese cyberpunk, graffiti and '80s videogame all in one.

From the captures and concept art Shields has shared on his website, *Neon Wasteland* is a colourful, sound and '80s-reference-packed, beautiful called 'The Subway Punks' are also some of the coolest characters on this list, with cybernetic dreadlocked leader Rapoo and her affinity with franco-cinema, cyborg called Pogo, and ice-cream-loving youngster called Kid Death and even a kitty with a tutu and bow. Yes, the definition of squad goals.

The comic hasn't been released yet, but Shields has announced that the first issue and free demo will be launched soon. Check www.robshields.net for more information.

UNSUNG HEROES

It takes more than just a writer and artist to make a modern comic. David Barnett looks at the often overlooked contributors in this most collaborative of creative arts

When comics are featured in the media, the focus – if creative teams are even mentioned at all – tends to be on the artists and writers... and very often just the writers. Even the most conscientious comics fan can be guilty of asking whether the "new Grant Morrison is out", or commenting on "Gail Simone's latest" online.

The truth is that your monthly graphic fix is usually the result of a close-working team effort. Inkers, colourists, letterers, designers... there's a veritable army involved in creating a book beyond the typical marquee names on the cover. And do you even know what a "flatter" does? Well, here's where you find out... and where we raise our hats to the unsung heroes who make comics the success they are, month in, month out.

COLOURING AND FLATTING

Hit Image creator-owned title *The Wicked + The Divine* is usually credited to writer Kieron Gillen and artist Jamie McKelvie, but according to Gillen the colours provided by Matt Wilson are vital. "Colourist recognition is a big deal for us," he says. "Matt is explicitly part of Team WicDiv in a way which we don't feel colourists always are. We think about colour as part of the comic – sometimes it's even the lead instrument, what the issue is 'about'.

"It's actually the jobs which get talked about even less which is our thing," he adds. "I mean, Dee Cunniffe is Matt's flatter. Flatters get so little credit that I suspect most readers haven't even heard of them, which is because most comics don't actually credit who does flats. We've included some flatted pages in the back of various trades, just to show the stage."

Flats? Flatters? What's that? "Flatting is a step in the process of colouring line art which is widely used for comic books," Cunniffe explains. The flatter lays down flat, solid blocks of colour, which a colourist then uses as the basis for more detailed and nuanced colour on the page. "It's a time-consuming process and most colourists farm their flats out. Working with so many talented colourists gave me an insight into the process of colouring comics, and I learn something new from my bosses every day."

Cunniffe is based in Ireland. Since 1996 she'd been "messing around with colouring" comics in Photoshop, not realising there was a career to be had from it until she saw a Facebook ad looking for a flatter in 2012. She explains: "I had no idea what a flatter was but I figured I'd give it a go. It was only a couple of pages a week, but I enjoyed it. The couple of pages a week soon turned into a couple a day, and then eventually it got out of hand and I was flatting for a dozen colourists and trying to flat 10-plus pages a day, hold down a full-time job and endure a very long commute."

Now a full-time flatter, Cunniffe has worked on a host of books including Vertigo's *Sandman Overture*. She says that things are changing, slowly, when it comes to recognition for her craft. "I

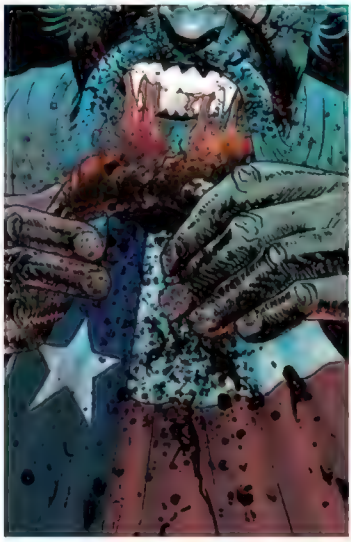
An example of Dee Cunniffe's flats for sci-fi tale *The Paybacks* from Dark Horse.

Jonathan Glapion's inking adds depth and texture to a pencilled Green Arrow cover by Shane Davis.

Todd Klein's lettering on *Promethea* gave characters quite distinct "voices"...

Klein's masterful work on *Sandman* added an entire dimension to the story.

Lisandro Estherren's line art, Dee Cunniffe's colour flats, and the finished colour cover for Image's *Redneck* #1.



think comic readers are starting to realise just how much of a team effort a comic book is, and it's the media who are the ones who fail to see the collaborative process that goes into the production of a funny book," she says.

Tamra Bonvillain is colourist on a diverse range of books including *Rat Queens*, *Angel Catbird* and *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur*, and she too thinks things are improving, albeit slowly. "I think things have gotten better, and there are definitely people that appreciate the work of colourists and other members of the team aside from line artists and writers, but we're still neglected in relation to them," she says. "Not everyone seems to realise how much of the heavy lifting is done by the colour to support the art, in some cases. Good or bad, as the case may be, the line artist tends to be the one who gets the credit for any of the visuals."

Bonvillain got into colouring through an interest in art and comics from a young age. "I went to the Joe Kubert School to learn more about working in comics specifically, and started to feel more confident in my colouring ability at the time," she explains. "After I graduated, I got a few small jobs here and there, often with or through other graduates. Eventually, I started getting enough work that I could make it my full-time job."

LETTERS

If colourists make the line art sing, then it's the letterers who help the writer's words jump off the page. According to Shelly Bond, former editor at DC and Vertigo, "great comic book letterers are also good artists in their own right. They have to be. The placement or positioning of the word balloon affects everything on the page. The lettering within the balloon border needs to be considered, not just stylistically but also in its point size and line weight."

> "READERS ARE STARTING TO REALISE HOW MUCH OF A TEAM EFFORT A COMIC IS"

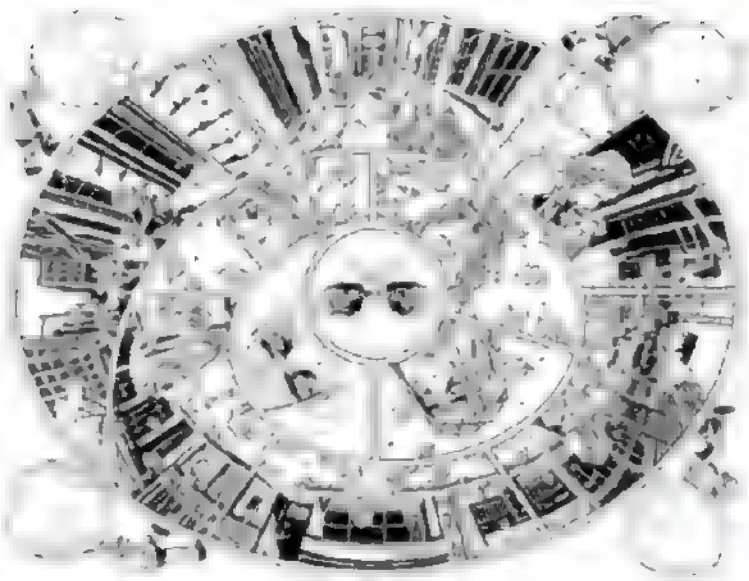
For Aditya Bidikar, learning to letter was a necessity. "I came to lettering originally as a writer who couldn't afford to pay a letterer," he reveals. "I taught myself how to do it with the help of online tutorials and lettering forums, and found the storytelling and craft aspects of lettering tremendously fun, to the point where I now do this instead."

Aditya's lettering appears in *Motor Crush*, *Drifter*, *18 Days* and *The Skeptics*. He says: "There's a growing appreciation for colourists in the industry as well as among reviewers, which is great to see, and down the chain of creators, more letterers are getting cover credit these days."

Pat Mills, the legendary writer-editor who launched *2000 AD*, was always keen to give his "lettering droids" full credit even back in the 1970s. He mentions "brilliant letterer" Tom Frame and points out that Jack Potter's early work on *Flesh*, *Invasion* and *Dan Dare* made him "the ultimate letterer".

Letterer Simon Bowland has worked for *2000 AD*... and Marvel, DC, Image, Dark Horse, Valiant, IDW, Boom, Titan... pretty much everyone.

"I think the lettering is hugely important. There's nothing worse than picking up a book which is superbly written and beautifully illustrated yet ruined by poor-quality lettering," he says.



Below, Eric Zawadzki's ink art for the opening of *The Dregs* #2 from Black Mask...

"It's so frustrating and unnecessary. You can assemble the greatest creative team in the world but choosing a letterer who's out of their depth will ultimately detract from the reader's enjoyment.

"Digital lettering has allowed anyone with some fonts and a copy of Illustrator to class themselves as a letterer, but the top letterers in the industry today are the guys who have come from a design background, who have studied at some depth the art of lettering, and who have honed their skills over many years," Bowland adds. "There's no substitute for that kind of quality, and moving forwards I'd really like to see the standard of lettering be improved industry wide."

BOOK DESIGN

Focusing on the story page, even if we recognise all those who contribute art, writing, colours and letters, we may forget that someone has put a lot of thought into how the entire book will look as a package once the various components are brought together. According to giant of the underground comics scene Denis Kitchen, "I don't think designers (other that Chip Kidd) get enough attention. For example, my Kitchen Sink Books partner John Lind does incredibly amazing work on books like *Sin City; Curator's Collection, Tony DiTerlizzi's Realms, Harvey Kurtzman's Jungle Book, The Best of Comix Book*, and Abrams' *Art of Harvey Kurtzman*, just to name a few. Yet almost every time I see reviews, plugs, and online discussions, it's my better known name that is almost always cited, even though I often have relatively little to do with some projects. It drives me crazy that critics and journalists too often overlook the designer, like John Lind, who makes beautiful books beautiful."

Design was important to *2000 AD* too, says Pat Mills. "Doug Church definitely made it sing!" he says. "Without Doug, *2000 AD* would have been a lesser success. It's hard to imagine or describe how he laid out stories for me. It's never been copied since – it was a unique, almost magical process."

EDITING

One final job is often overlooked even today. Even among comics creators themselves, editors don't get enough

Dee Cunniffe creates colour flats (left) as the first step in her colouring (below).

recognition. For letterer Aditya Bidikar, "editors remain the currently unsung heroes of comics, for the invisible hard work they put in." According to Shelly Bond, if, say, "the lettering is total a mess, I blame the editor. Her job is to hire the right talent for the job".

Pat Mills has plenty of love for the current incumbent of the *2000 AD* editor's chair, Matt Smith. (No, not Tharg the Mighty. He kind of has an executive role these days.) Mills says: "He's been editor of *2000 AD* almost since the millennium. That's an astonishing achievement, and it's been an aggro free era. *2000 AD* is a comic that raises intense emotions, passion and arguments, but Matt seems to have secret techniques that enable him to deal with them all."

So, across all the disciplines of comic creation there are jobs that are often going unheralded. It's bound to be frustrating for those involved. Simon Bowland admits, "It is a little frustrating sometimes that colourists and letterers – colourists less so nowadays – are almost pushed to one side. At the end of the day, the writers and the artists are the ones who are truly 'creating' the comic. But at the same time, without a letterer the comic is going to be silent, devoid of words, which would make it far less enjoyable a read. So whilst I accept that I'm considered to be the least important member of a creative team, at the same time I think it's nice when a letterer gets a little recognition for their efforts."

Dee Cunniffe agrees: "It's terrible to see press and web reviews of a comic book that completely fail to acknowledge the artists but laud the writer. There are great creators out there, Declan Shalvey for one, who never fail to call out guilty journalists for failing to credit where credit is due."

It's something we can all be better at, starting by educating those who still, for example, praise Stan Lee as the "artist" of Marvel Comics. Kieron Gillen says, "I mean, the core thing in comics is that the mainstream public simply don't know anything about how comics are made. Which is obviously natural and understandable, as it's a fringe medium in popularity... So there's so many societal preconceptions that have to be corrected." Due recognition starts here.

Veteran British stylist Shaky Kane contributes a Bullwhip pinup page.

PULP FICTION

Josh Bayer tells **Stephen Jewell** about creating Fantagraphics' first superhero universe with All Time Comics

As the home of Peter Bagge's *Hate* and Joe Sacco's *Palestine*, Fantagraphics Books is not a name you would normally associate with superheroes. But while the likes of Daniel Clowes and Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez have played around with the genre's lurid spandex-clad trappings in *Eightball* and *Love And Rockets* respectively, the Seattle-based publisher is now plunging headlong into the fantastical world of caped crusaders and masked avengers with All Time Comics, a new line of titles headed up by brothers Josh and Sam Bayer.

"It's not so much a question of why would we come together as [the fact that] I'm very comfortable with how Fantagraphics does business and what they showcase," says Josh Bayer. "As for them, I think they would recognise that the comics are good, no matter what they're about. That's the bottom line. They wouldn't publish them if they weren't interesting and didn't have something to say about the direction in which comics are evolving. And the fact is that a lot of younger alternative cartoonists are now embracing their roots as fans of sci-fi, superheroes and other genre adventure comics."

Previously known for his self-published underground anthologies *Suspect Device* and *The Black Hood*, Josh is taking charge of the comics. His brother Sam – a filmmaker who helmed 2010's *A Nightmare On Elm Street* remake along with numerous music videos including Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" – is exploring options in other mediums.

"Sam came to me with the characters, and some were more developed than others," says Josh. "He has some stuff he wants to do with them in this medium, and I'm as interested as anyone in what shape the characters will take. They might be at a different stage or take place in a different era, such as with the short film Sam recently did, which starred LeMonica Garrett as Crime Destroyer, Monica Schaefer as Bullwhip and Steve Jones from the Sex >

UGH! WHAT ARE THESE THINGS?
SWEET MOTHER OF GOD & CHRISTMAS--THEY'RE UGLY!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON HERE, BUT IT'S OVER, FREAKS--!
HRRRH
AGH!
MY EYE!
WUP
NOT THE FIRST TIME I HIT A TRIPLE-HEADER WITHOUT A LEAGUE BAT.
GOOD THING FOR THEM I DON'T HAVE MY GEAR... I DON'T USUALLY LET ANYONE WHO AMBUSHES ME LIVE.
I MUST BE FIVE CLICKS INTO THIS TUNNEL BY NOW... WAIT, WHAT'S THAT?
NOISES AHEAD...LIGHT--! THE WOTAN CULT--? I'VE FOUND THEM...

Crime Destroyer #1 boasts script by Josh Bayer and art by Herb Trimpe and Ben Marra.

> Pistols as the guitar-wielding villain. There's also a lot of crossover, as Sam worked on the comic book logos with his designer Robert Hales, and it was Sam's idea to do vintage ads in the comics. We discussed different directions for the ads and put our heads together and asked 'How do we get the feeling of the best of the old time vintage ads?' It was an important point to give the books more texture."

LOOKING BACK

When it came to creating All Time Comics' lurid, four-colour-style world, both Josh and Sam drew on their childhood love of classic Marvel and DC fare. "I've always enjoyed all sorts of comics, but I especially love superheroes and crime comics because I grew up with them," Josh explains. "I will take any opportunity where I have the freedom to do comics, especially if I get to work with a talent pool that I'm excited about. Alan Moore started out doing six page sci-fi stories for *2000 AD*, so you learn these things and then you graduate up the ranks."

The nostalgic tone of All Time Comics is in fact reminiscent of the America's Best Comics imprint that the Northampton mage started at Wildstorm in 1999 before its move to DC, and the *1963* limited series that he, Steve Bissette and Rick Veitch released through Image Comics in 1993. "Those Alan Moore comics are definitely a guiding inspiration for All Time Comics, as well as some of Marvel's New Universe line," Josh says. "Alan Moore is someone who can breathe new life into seemingly moribund concepts, and that's like a magic trick. Of course, Alan Moore literally identifies himself as a magician. I'm less formal about magic, but I see the magic of comics and the connection between myth and a greater appreciation of life. So, yeah, those books are deeply embedded in my thoughts as examples of successful superhero comics."

Having launched with *Crime Destroyer* in March, with *Bullwhip* set for release in April and *Atlas* and *Blind Justice* to follow in May and June, All Time Comics' main protagonists appear to have been modelled on iconic characters like Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman. "All of those things are in there, and there's also some elements of old Golden Age comics, such as where an orphaned city kid discovers a vast cavern in the subway," Josh explains. "It could also be like a Silver Age story where a Norse prince comes across a missing weapon in the middle of nowhere, or a pilot discovers an injured alien. All of those traditional elements are in there, as well as the trope of an invulnerable character having a secret weakness."

Crime Destroyer – or should we say "criminal killer" – in action. Variant cover by Johnny Ryan.

With his tragic origin story more closely resembling that of Frank Castle than Bruce Wayne, Crime Destroyer brings to mind the Punisher as much as Batman. "Crime Destroyer could have a bit of Punisher and Batman in him, and he's a bit of a *Grindhouse* archetype, as Sam's really into that movie," explains Josh, who also cites 1970s exploitation movies like *Rolling Thunder* and *Johnny Firecloud* as significant influences. "All of those things were inspirational in writing Crime Destroyer, who is a war vet who comes home to find that his family has been murdered, so he declares war on crime. So, sure, there are those elements floating around, although in those old movies the heroes never blew up things with death rays or fought mutated crime lords while driving a Trans Am with machine guns on the hood."

Meanwhile, *Bullwhip* has some sly fun with Wonder Woman's notorious BDSM overtones. "She has things about her that might remind people of Huntress, Hellcat, Black Widow, Ms. Marvel or Catwoman in that she wears a black leather outfit and rides a motorcycle," says Josh. "But those things are just stepping stones, as she's really her own thing."

What with Bullwhip facing the chauvinistic menace of the Misogynist and Crime Destroyer emphasising his African-American roots, both series reflect the turbulent, changing social climate of the 1970s. "We wanted to mirror the kinds of characters that were in comics during the period that we're looking back on," Josh reflects. "At the time, black characters were just starting to get their own books from the Big Two, and there was also an uptick in new female heroines, so both of those things were breakthroughs in the early '70s. As for the Misogynist, that was a no-brainer, and so were the Nazi and Ku Klux Klan villains that the characters fight."

OUTSIDERS

While Crime Destroyer, Bullwhip and Atlas are based around DC's famous trinity, *Blind Justice* harks back to more obscure outsiders like Ragman, the Creeper and D-Man, >

THE MYSOGINIST SEES HIS OPPORTUNITY TO STRIKE AT BULLWHIP!
I DON'T KNOW, CANDY. I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE HIM...
NOW IS MY CHANCE!
BUT BULLWHIP'S HEIGHTENED AWARENESS TRIUMPHS!
WHAM!
OUTSIDE THE CONCERT VENUE...
GLAD TO SEE THE MYSOGINIST GETTING TAKEN AWAY--FUCKIN' CREEP!
WHAT THE FUCK'S GOING ON OVER THERE?
GET IN THE CAR, CUTIE PIE... WE HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU.
TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF MY TITS, PIGS!
HEY--!! WHAT ARE YOU DOING? YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE PEACE OFFICERS!!
YEAH? WHAT'S THAT MEAN?
MAYBE WE SHOULD ARREST YOU, TOO!
DON'T EVEN MAKE ME LAUGH.
KA-POW!
HK!
KA-POW!
UNF!

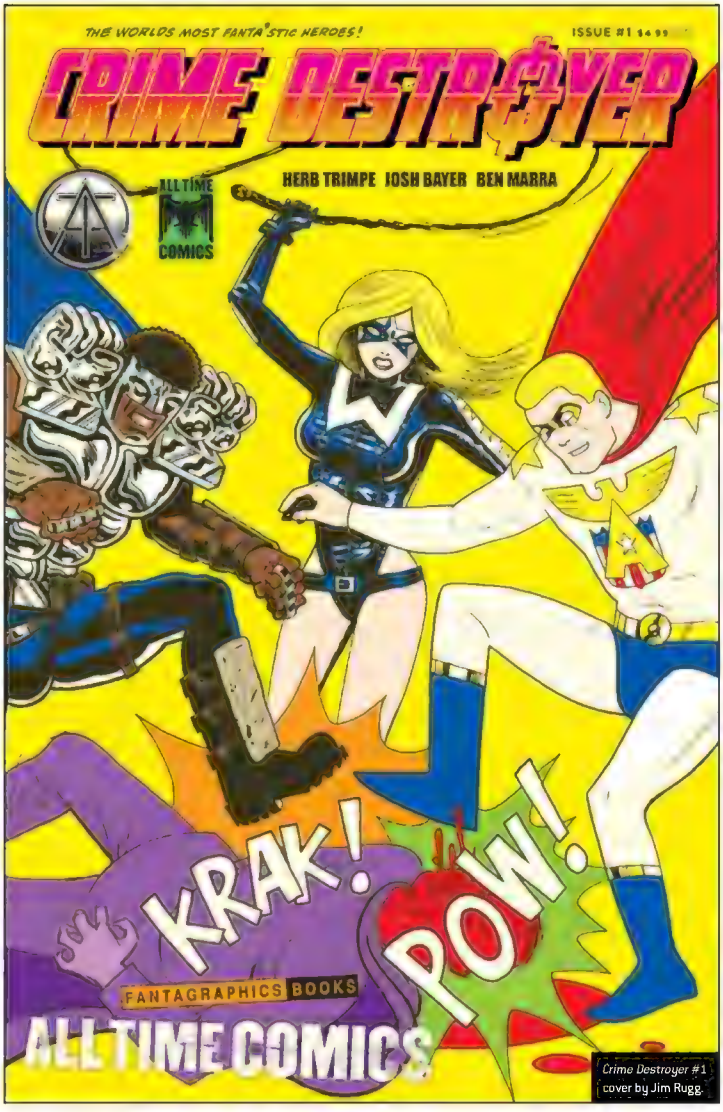
Bullwhip #1 pencils by Ben Marra, inks by industry veteran Al Milgrom.

alias Demolition Man, a supporting character in *The Thing* and *Captain America* in the 1980s. "Apart from D-Man, those characters haven't always been written the way I'd like to see them," says Josh. "They're all damaged, mentally divergent heroes. The Creeper was employed, but the other characters live in the grey zone between poverty and homelessness. So the fantasy that you can remain resilient and strong while opting out of the American capitalist system is the biggest power fantasy in any of those comics."

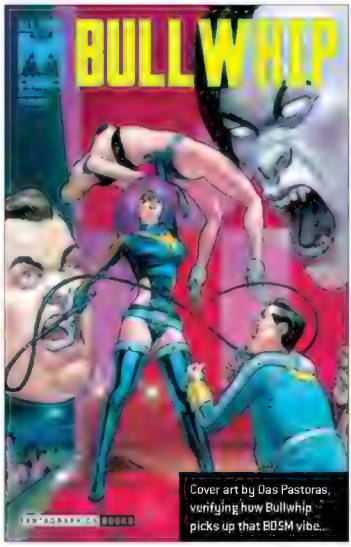
With *Blind Justice* based at the Optic City Center for Cranial Trauma Victims, Josh also drew on the sad plight of Bill Mantlo. Best known for writing Rom and Micronauts in addition to co-creating Rocket Raccoon, Mantlo was left seriously brain damaged after being the victim of a hit-and-run accident in 1992 and now requires institutional care, which definitely doesn't come cheap in the US.

"It's certainly important to me," says Josh. "That these guys like Bill Mantlo worked on characters for years and received no security is ridiculous. Imagine working in a comics store for six months and having nothing left at the

> "WE'RE MIRRORING THE KINDS OF CHARACTERS IN COMICS DURING THE PERIOD WE'RE LOOKING BACK ON"



Crime Destroyer #1 cover by Jim Rugg.



Cover art by Das Pastoras, verifying how Bullwhip picks up that BDSM vibe...

end of the day, no financial recompense for something that you breathed life into and fleshed out. Now imagine that you worked for eight years, like Mantlo did on *Rom*, providing plots and details and building the character and their backstory, but you're at the mercy of an industry that considered him disposable, which is insane. The tradition of cartoonists and writers not getting stronger worker's-rights laws to protect them goes back decades to the way the medium was written off as disposable and even destructive. What happened to Mantlo has an extra layer of shocking tragedy to it because it was so meaningless. It's like the end of David Mazzucchelli's graphic novel *Asterios Polyp*, where the character gets hit by the meteor on the last page. It's like a sad joke that life writes into its script sometimes."

Alongside younger artists like Ben Marra, Noah Van Sciver and Rick Buckler, Josh was determined to involve some industry veterans in All Time Comics. In what would turn out to be his last ever work, the late Herb Trimpe was brought on board to pencil *Crime Destroyer* #1, while Al Milgrom is inking several titles. "I'd already crossed paths and done comics events with Noah Van Sciver and Ben Marra, while I found Rick Buckler – who is the son of [*Deathlok co-creator*] Rich Buckler – on Facebook," says Josh. "For the older artists, I reached out to exhibitors and collectors, and just looked on websites for their contact info. I really wanted to make a good impression on Herb Trimpe and Al Milgrom, so I just wrote really elaborately professional, detailed scripts with no messy filler."

All Time Comics is being promoted as a shared universe, so expect plenty of synergy between the titles, with Atlas guest-starring in *Crime Destroyer* #1 for starters. However, Josh insists that there won't be any convoluted continuity or any *Secret Wars*-style crossovers for at least a few years. "We're pretty far off from that," he laughs. "But that's an issue that you get with companies that have been around for 70 years. We have a stripped-down line of books, so the amount of confusion we could create by having the characters band together would be pretty minimal. But people should know – and my team keeps asking me to remind audiences – that these are definitely not books with interdependent narratives. All of the comics in this series are independent, stand-alone stories, so you can buy all of them, just a few or even just one without coming across any narrative holes."

Trapped in Weatherfield

Graham Kibble-White meets **Paul B. Rainey**, the idiosyncratic, articulate talent behind *There's No Time Like The Present*

This year Paul B. Rainey turns 50. "I'm part-time in my current job," he tells *Comic Heroes*.

"It's Monday till Wednesday lunchtime, then that's it, it's over." The rest of the week he's dedicating to creating comics. After a fashion. "I find I get up on a Thursday and I go, 'I'll just potter a bit. I'll see who's on *The Wright Stuff*...' I don't really get going until the afternoon."

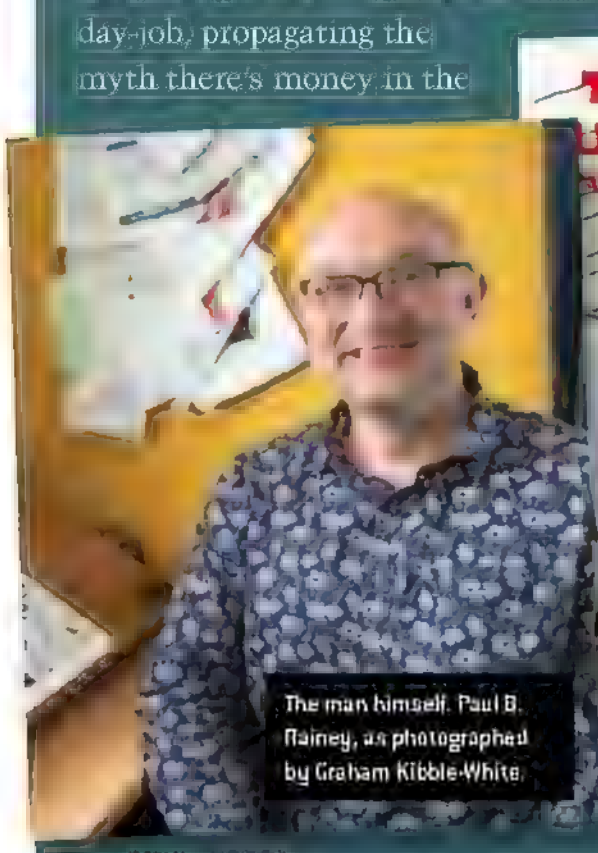
That work work balance ("real" work vs comics) is indicative of many creators – it's just that few of them will admit to the day-job, propagating the myth there's money in the industry. "Well, there is," reasons Rainey. "But Mark Millar's got it all."

After school, Rainey failed to get into art college. "The night before my interview, I realised I didn't have a portfolio, so I borrowed my sister's *Smash Hits* and did all these pencil drawings of Howard Jones." He has worked in an insurer's office, behind the till at Forbidden Planet, as a porter in a department store, in a photographic studio, at the Abbey National (two stints, first time around, he engineered his own firing – which is another story) and currently he's in that equitable arrangement with the Open University.

None of this diminishes Rainey's achievements. He's been on the comics scene for 25 years, with his own quirky releases from slice-of-life to hard sci-fi, a continuing body of work that includes his graphic novel *There's No Time Like The Present* and his current ongoing strip in *Time Weakly*, *Why Don't You Love Me?*

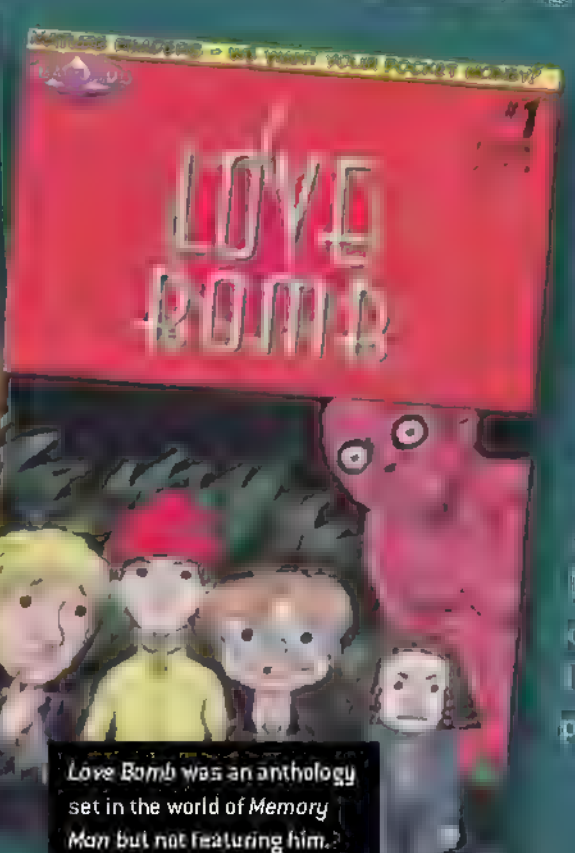
"This will sound a bit pretentious, but one of the things about being a man is you need to have a sense of humour regarding your expectations. As a kid you're saying, 'I'm going to be a successful comic writer.' And the reality is, life is not what you thought it was. But you need to find that funny. If you feel inferior and inadequate because of it, that results in arsehole behaviour."

Does this mean he's accepted there's no point giving himself a hard time about the fact his comics haven't led to Hollywood options? "Oh no. I still get livid about it. Sometimes I pace the flat, ranting at the

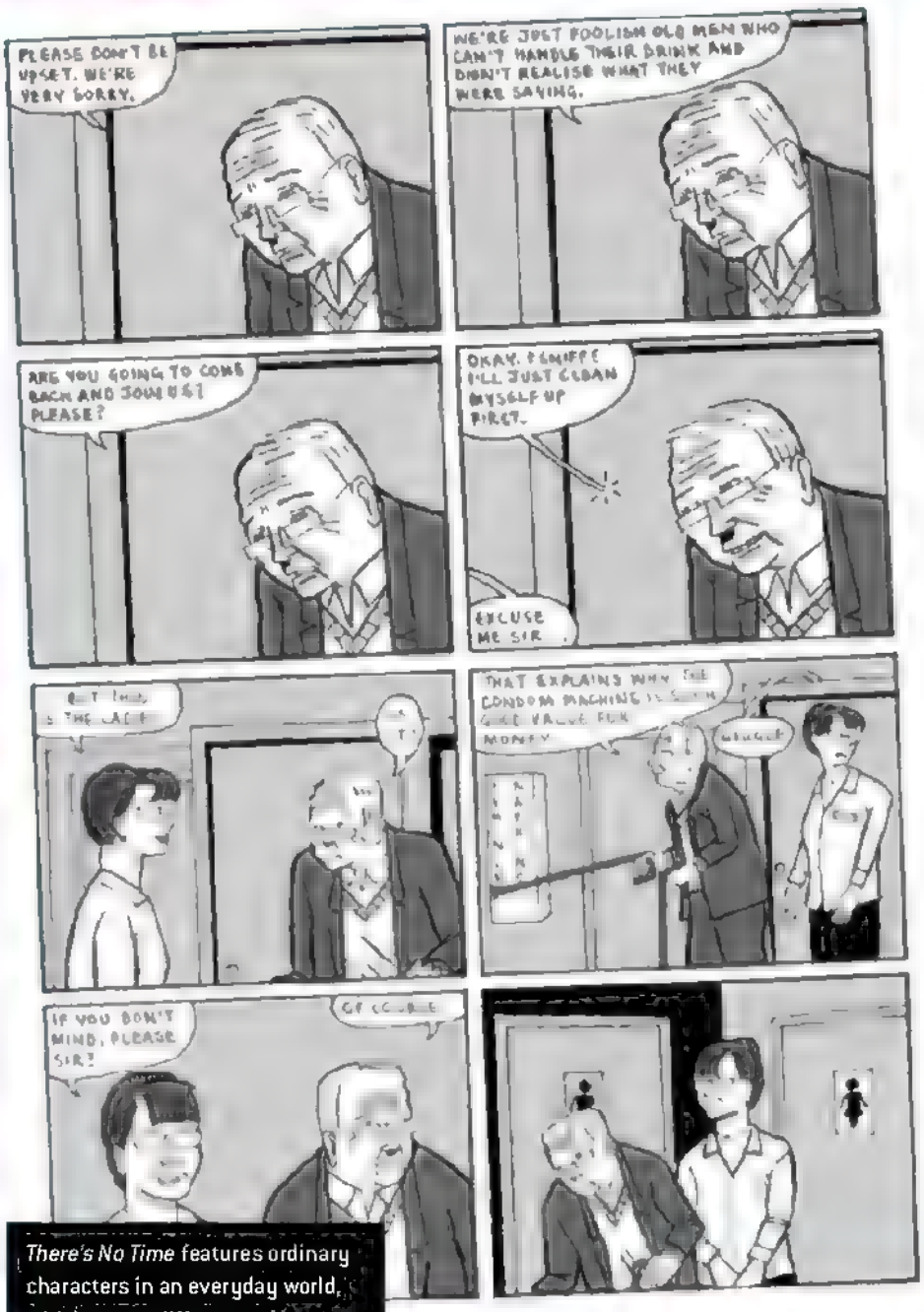


The man himself: Paul B. Rainey, as photographed by Graham Kibble-White.

There's No Time... was a real labour of love, taking seven years to complete.



Love Bomb was an anthology set in the world of *Memory Man* but not featuring him.


PLEASE DON'T BE UPSET. WE'RE VERY SORRY.
WE'RE JUST FOOLISH OLD MEN WHO CAN'T HANDLE THEIR DRINK AND DIDN'T REALISE WHAT THEY WERE SAYING.
ARE YOU GOING TO COME BACK AND SOUND OK? PLEASE?
OKAY, FINE! I'LL JUST CLEAN MYSELF UP FIRST.
EXCUSE ME SIR
BUT I WAS THE CALL
THAT EXPLAINS WHY THE CONDOM MACHINE
GIVE VALUE FOR MONEY
STUCK
IF YOU DON'T MIND, PLEASE SIR?
OF COURSE

There's No Time features ordinary characters in an everyday world, with just one difference...

THE GOVERNMENT IS RAISING THE RETIREMENT AGE TO SEVENTY BECAUSE OF THE £200 BILLION PENSION SHORTFALL.
SORRY FOR THE DELAY YOU WERE SAY NG?
YEAH, MY OFFICE APPLICATIONS STILL AREN'T WORKING AND IT'S BEEN NEARLY THREE DAYS SINCE I REPORTED IT.
OUR CONTRACT WITH YOUR ORGANISATION IS THREE DAYS FOR RESOLUTION.
YES, I KNOW, BUT I RELY ON OFFICE FOR EVERYTHING I DO.
I CAN ONLY OPEN THE INTRANET AND 'VE READ EVERYTHING THERE. I'M HAV NG TO RESORT TO READING THE DEPRESSING NEWS FEED. FOR GODS SAKE.
HA HA YOU SHOULD TREAT IT LIKE A HOLIDAY.
YES. 'A HOLIDAY' EXCEPT AT MY DESK
AWAY FROM ANY DAYLIGHT. WITH MY BOSS TUTTING LOUDLY EVERY TIME HE PASSES MY DESK AND SEES ME NOT DOING ANYTHING.
OH WELL. I'LL CALL YOU 'HELP DESK' PEOPLE BACK IN AN HOUR WHEN THE RESOLUTION TIME HAS ELAPSED.

Time travel exists. And yet, it doesn't seem to have solved real-life problems...

walls. But... I'm still a comic creator. It's just not my living. That doesn't invalidate it." A pause, and then: "Although I do often think, if I hadn't discovered comics, I might have had a successful career somewhere else."

Paul B. Rainey (he embraced the inclusion of his middle initial when the "pea brain" possibilities were pointed out to him) entered British fandom in the 1980s, reading zines and attending conventions. Taking inspiration from Dave Sim's epic achievement in self publishing, *Cerebus*, he launched his own title in 1995: superhero satire *Memory Man*. "My friend knew a printer and I got 200 copies done for £200."

All started well when Diamond Distributors agreed to carry the title. "I was convinced I was going to make a living out of it," he recalls. "I thought, 'I just need to sell X-amount of copies', and I'd calculated that was something like 2,000. Brilliant! What I got were orders of 150 at the most. And then, as you know, in the direct comics market sales fall off for each subsequent issue. By the end, it was about 110, but because of the way printing worked I had to get at least 500 done for the unit price. I was haemorrhaging money, so I decided to stop and learn from my experience. Hopefully."

His next venture, anthology title *Love Bomb*, debuted in 1997 and felt of a piece with indie darlings *Eightball* and *Hate*. "The orders were just under 400. But issue 2's dropped, and I was still out of pocket. Then I got contacted by Diamond saying, 'We don't want to carry it anymore'. I was devastated."

Although Rainey gave up on his hopes for a comic career, he continued to be a fan and took notice in 2001, when Phil Hall – "He used to be the assistant editor of *Comics International*" – put together PDF magazine *Borderline*, "with people he'd met on message boards". Another failed, if valiant, attempt to monetise independent comics, it nonetheless brought Rainey back into the fold. "I drew strips for it taking the piss out of mainstream comics and creators. It was a bit mean-spirited if I'm truthful, and I'm not proud of a lot of that stuff. But I thought, 'I'm never going to make it, so I don't have to be nice'."

> "I'M A COMIC CREATOR. IT'S JUST NOT MY LIVING. THAT DOESN'T INVALIDATE IT"

What's more, "the characters who went on to be in *There's No Time Like The Present* made their formative appearances there

WHY DON'T YOU LOVE ME?
PBRAINEY
MUMMY! MUMMY!
CAN WE GO TO SCHOOL TODAY?
JESUS...
WHAT ARE YOU ASKING ME FOR? HOW SHOULD I KNOW?
THOMAS... TOMMY... TOM ... WHATEVER YOUR NAME IS ... GO AND PUT YOUR UNIFORM ON. I'LL TAKE YOU.
WHERE IS OUR UNIFORMS?
I DON'T KNOW. WHEREVER YOU LEFT IT. SCATTERED ACROSS YOUR BEDROOM FLOOR?
BUT IT'S DIRTY!
LOOK, DO YOU WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL OR DON'T YOU?
UM... DO YOU THINK YOU SHOULD BE DOING THAT INDOORS?
YOU KNOW... PASSIVE SMOKING AND ALL THAT...
CHRIST! DO YOU MEAN ALL THIS MIGHT BE REAL?
THERE! HAPPY NOW?
SSS
HA HA! YOU'RE KEEN! SCHOOL ON A SATURDAY?
YOU NAUGHTY BOY! YOU MADE ME THINK IT'S A WEEKDAY!

Bad parenting with a quirky, off-kilter and very British perspective.

because I came up with this story about comic readers who were in their 80s. At that time, we were all in our 30s and I felt it was absurd we were still into this stuff. This was my attempt at satire."

Even though *Borderline* ceased publication in 2004, it reinvigorated Rainey, who realised that despite resistance to paying for material on the web, it was an effective way to get his stuff out there. "That's where my modern era of work started," he says.

> "THEY WILL NEVER BE HAPPY, NEVER ACHIEVE ANYTHING. THAT IS THEIR LIFE"

"I had a regular job, 35 hours a week, so the pragmatic reality was, I could commit to drawing one panel a day." Which is what he did, publishing online documenting different aspects of his life. It seemed to work. "I realised people remembered *Memory Man*, and I was considered part of a small press scene. There was a lot of goodwill and support which was lovely.

"Over a period of a year or so, I started to see the stats going up. That was cool. Then I compiled a lot of panels together into a 16-page zine – completely self-assembled – and went to events and sold more of them than I was expecting. Whereas with *Memory Man*, I was thinking I was going to be quitting my day job with this, I was just seeing how it went. I've taken that approach ever since, and I've rarely been disappointed."

In 2009, Rainey turned this work into the 112-page *Book Of Lists*, a funny and delightfully blunt series of snapshots in which he grouped similar-themed panels to produce one or two-page strips under headings such as *Disappointments*, *Inappropriate Things I've Said* and *Notes To Self – Stop Acting Lazy*. "I'm fortunate Milton Keynes has a pretty good arts association called Arts Gateway MK, who gave me funding to publish the book. So, I had 100 copies printed, and then when they sold, I did another 100."

Aside from discovering a publishing model that worked, Rainey was coming into his own creatively. *Book Of Lists* is infused with a very singular, very British voice: neurotic, wringing drama out of trivialities, caustic but not unkind, and accessible. Enthused, he took a year's sabbatical and embarked on his biggest work to date.

There's No Time Like The Present is an intense work that reads like it's from the pressure cooker of Rainey's creative life. "It's an amalgamation of things I've been thinking about for years. The advantage of a day job and not having time to draw is I don't get the opportunity to execute all

the ideas I have. It means I don't hoard them when I do get the chance."

One element of the story is the fractious friendship shared by three comic fans. "For a long time I had an idea for a strip about a group of nerds, which I guess is like *The Big Bang Theory*, but it predates that. There's also a time travel strand, tourists travelling via receivers and transmitters until legislation is brought in to shut down the practice," an echo, admits Rainey, of the UK's then simmering uncertainties about Europe. Accompanying that new technology is the "ultraner", wherein it's possible to access information from the future. Rainey's characters use it in a brilliantly facile fashion – to download upcoming episodes of *Emmerdale* and *Doctor Who*.

50 YEARS LATER...

But the most arresting, and disruptive, aspect of the narrative is the way it jumps forward half a century partway through the book, rejoining the trio in their final years. "That was so exciting to me, because when I was drawing it and self-publishing it, it was originally serialised over 18 issues. I knew this was going to happen, and I thought, 'It's going to blow everyone's minds!'" says Paul, before deadpanning, "although it didn't seem to at the time."

In depicting the three in their dotage squabbling over inconsequentialities, Rainey says, "I wanted to tell the reader, 'They're never going to be happy – they will not achieve anything.' That is their life." A death among them leads to a coda, which involves resurrection and a hard-sci-fi jaunt across the far-future, all inspired, says Rainey, "by either something I'd heard late night on Radio 4, or read in the Guardian, about science proving the existence of God.

"All of these things had been separate ideas, which somehow I melded into a single narrative."

Having completed his run, Rainey hoped to approach a publisher about collecting it as a graphic novel. "But I didn't know how, so I contacted a handful of people who'd had stuff published, looking for advice." One of those was Paul Gravett, founder of *Escape* magazine, who told him he'd love to run it in the Escape Books range. "I just went, 'Yeah, all right then'," laughs Rainey.

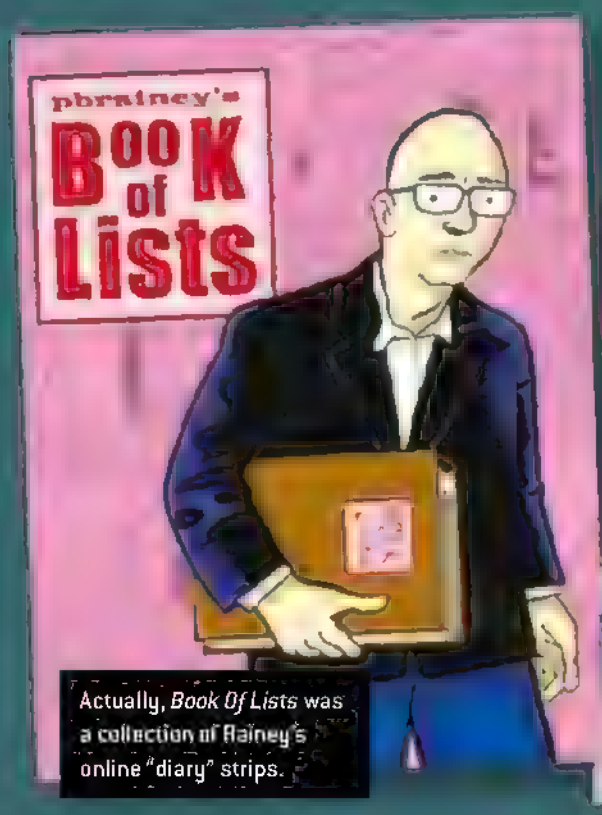
Just as you suspected, all the soaps take place on specially constructed parallel worlds.

For the collected version, released in 2015, he was asked to add grey tones to the art and there was also a discussion about removing one character's use of the c-word (ultimately it stayed in). The finished volume, designed by Peter Stanbury, is beautiful, surely a validation of everything Rainey had hoped to achieve creatively? "There was about three years between me signing the contract with Escape and them publishing the book, and I've no doubt the process deadened the emotional response for me when I eventually saw the result. It was a good job too, given that I was overwhelmed. Without that, I think my heart would have burst. But I don't want it to be my only book."

His next serial, *Thunder Brother Soap Division*, was a wildly imaginative and amusing fantasy in which soap operas play out for real in alternative universes, but represented something of a cul-de-sac, and fittingly the series stalled at issue 6 with a cliff-hanger set in a parody of Brookside Close. Rainey reckons, "I lived with the idea for too long, and it kind of passed its striking point. If I was doing it in the 1990s, it might have had a cultural relevance. But not now."

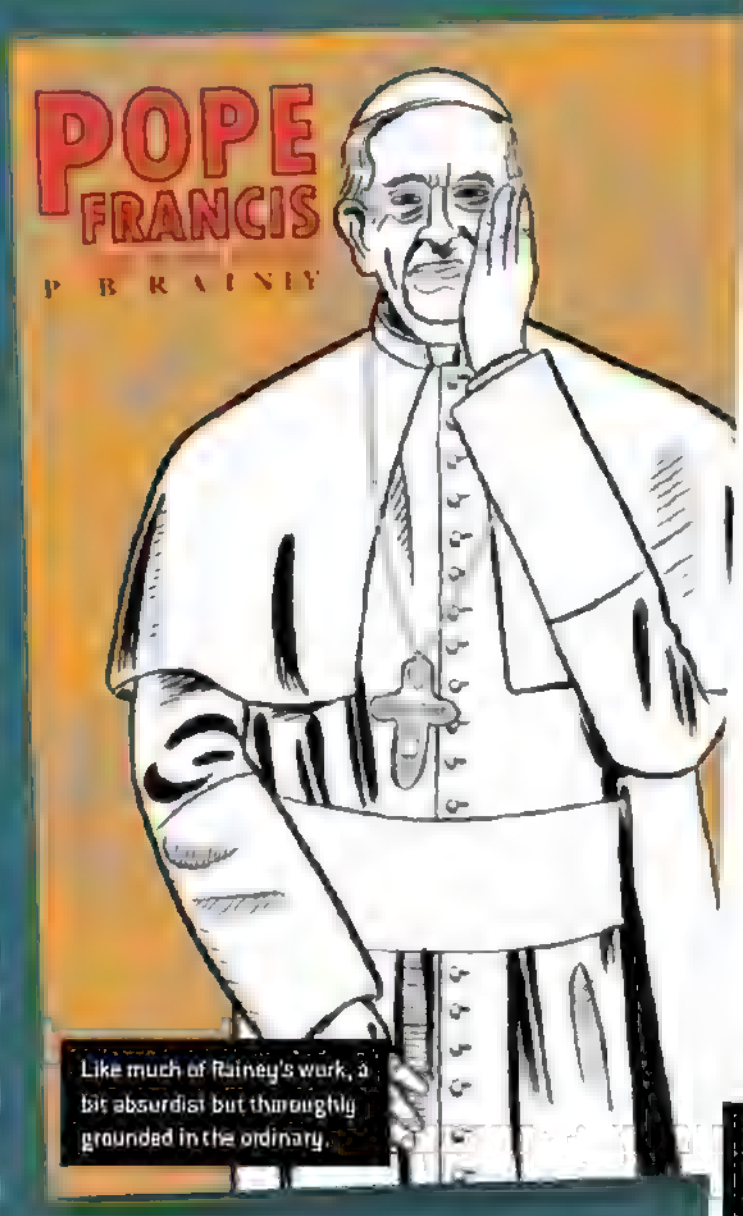
While working on his own projects, Rainey had also been submitting cartoons to *Viz* comic. For a very long time. "Around 2013, after 27 years of sending them stuff, they went, 'Yeah, we'll have this.' I then had a run of about 12 months where I had something in pretty much every issue. I've not been so lucky the last couple of years..."

His breakthrough was *14-Year-Old Stand-Up Comedian*, a nuanced observational strip that seems unlike usual *Viz* fare. Rainey agrees. "I've found that when I've consciously tried to do



Actually, *Book Of Lists* was a collection of Rainey's online "diary" strips.

Rainey calls his '90s book *Memory Man* his "post-modern superhero comic".



Like much of Rainey's work, a bit absurdist but thoroughly grounded in the ordinary.

Rainey plays an amazing number of variations on the theme of teeth and the Pope.

Viz-type strips, they're the ones they tend to reject. They respond more positively to the ones where I'm amusing myself." Some of his *Viz* work – plus other short strips – can be found in his self-published *Pope Francis Goes To The Dentist* and *Tales to Diminish*.

But right now, he's spending the latter half of every week on *Why Don't You Love Me?*, serialised in the digital anthology *Aces Weekly*. "It's going to run for 210 pages," says Rainey, who hopes it will also appear in book form. Describing it as the "antidote to *Peanuts*", he tells it from an adult's point of view, children's heads occasionally jutting into the bottom of panels. The plot follows Mark and Claire, who are uninterested in the business of being parents to Charley and Sally, and unengaged by each other, too. It's styled like a Sunday newspaper strip, and Rainey says he's been told not to use any "category A" swearwords. "I'm okay with that, it becomes a challenge. I've just got to find a more creative way to express that this character wants the room to himself so he can masturbate."

NOT BAD PEOPLE, REALLY

"Also, because it's about negligent parents – or it seems to be – I felt the language restriction was helpful. I don't think adults would normally swear in front of kids, unless they're utterly obnoxious and cruel. I wanted these two to kind of be like, 'That could be me or one of my friends'. They're not bad people... It's supposed to be ambiguous."

"The thing is, when you're a kid, you think all adults are part of some conspiracy. As an adult, you realise that no-one has any idea what they're doing, particularly how to manage kids. That's all it is. It's the idea that if I became a parent, I would find it a bloody nightmare. I would enjoy it, and it would probably be the most rewarding thing I've ever done – but I'd want the evenings free."

Just as in *There's No Time...*, Rainey promises there will be a huge break in the narrative partway through. "It's going to be pretty bleak, but it's not joyless. Life is full of humour. There are things these characters could do to improve their situation if they chose to behave differently. They are a bit narcissistic and self-absorbed. Not everything is beyond their control – dunno. I'm rambling. You can tell I've been thinking about it a lot."

> "IT'S PRETTY BLEAK, BUT IT'S NOT JOYLESS. LIFE IS FULL OF HUMOUR"

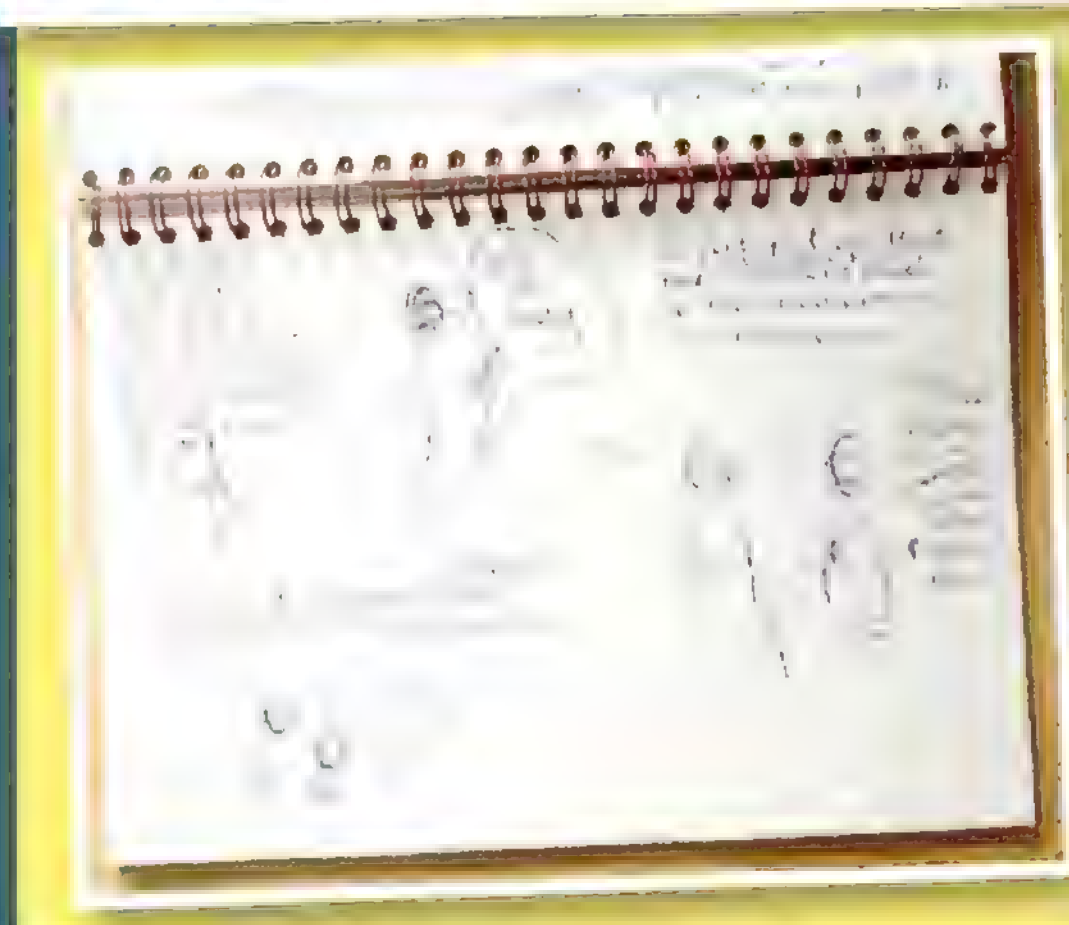
Maybe it's that depth of thought that means, despite its esoteric concepts, Rainey's work has always been accessible, an easy read. "Comics used to have mass appeal, and I think it would be great if I could do something in that spirit," he explains. But that's not his sole inspiration – he also cites the episodes of *Coronation Street* he would watch as a kid. "When someone left the soap back then, they moved out of the street, and it was an indication they'd been successful in some way, because living there meant failure. When Elsie Tanner went off with her American boyfriend, that was her happy ending. The rest of us? We were trapped in Weatherfield, not being able to pay our bills and with people saying mean things behind our backs."

Trapped, but in some cases cheerfully so. "My boss at the Open University, who has approved my 'I think it's agile working', has said, 'Yes, you should concentrate on your comics, brilliant'," chuckles Rainey. "But I don't expect to make any money. I'll be back full time next year."

SOMEWHERE IN A PARALLEL UNIVERSE...

Paul B. Rainey takes us on an exclusive journey into his head – and out the other side

THE INTERVIEW
BY PAUL B. RAINEY
I MET GRAHAM FROM COMIC HEROES AS ARRANGED. THIS WOULD BE MY FIRST INTERVIEW SINCE MY IMAGINARY MEDIA BLACKLISTING.
IT IS HARD TO PINPOINT EXACTLY WHAT TRIGGERED MY BLACKLISTING.
PAUL, TELL US ALL ABOUT YOUR NEW COMIC, 'MY SISTER IS A STINKY POO-HEAD'.
WELL, MICHAEL...
IT MAY HAVE BEEN THAT TIME I WAS AN IMAGINARY GUEST ON WOGAN.
PAUL, TELL US ALL ABOUT YOUR REBOOT OF MARVEL COMICS' ENTIRE LINE.
IT COULD HAVE BEEN THAT FIGHT I GOT INTO DURING MY IMAGINARY APPEARANCE ON PARKINSON.
HELP US! HE'S THROTTLING EMU!
HE TRIED TO BITE MY UNDER AREA!
THAT'S A WIG, RIGHT? THAT'S DEFINITELY A WIG! WHY DON'T YOU HAVE SOME BALD DIGNITY LIKE WHAT I HAVE?
WHY YOU CHEEKY ...!
OR PERHAPS IT WAS THAT TIME I IMAGINE THAT I DRANK TOO MUCH IN THE GREEN ROOM ON THE JONATHAN ROSS SHOW.
EURK!
FORTUNATELY, MY REAL INTERVIEW WITH GRAHAM SEEMED TO GO WELL...
BLAH BLAH BLAH MY GRAPHIC NOVEL BLAH BLAH BLAH THERE'S NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT.
EXCEPT FOR...
THAT'S ALL VERY WELL, PAUL, BUT HOW IS THIS RELEVANT TO THE ROLE OF ADMIN ASSISTANT THAT I'M INTERVIEWING YOU FOR?



The terrifying thing about creative artists is the way that everything in their lives becomes material for their work. Paul B. Rainey transmuted his experience of being interviewed for *Comic Heroes* into – what else? – a flight of fancy about his imaginary experiences being interviewed over the years, and even included the sketchbook pages where he evolved his ideas. We'd have paid to see that Parkinson interview...

This page: Mr Hur is sometimes known in France as "the Korean Tezuka", thanks in part to his *Hammer Boy*, translated soon after it appeared in 1990

HUR YOUNG-MAN

A Brilliant Korea

A household name and best-selling legend in South Korea, Hur Young-man deserves global acclaim as a remarkable maestro of multiple genres of manhwa, says **Paul Gravett**

In South Korea comics are called *manhwa*, a term derived from the same two Chinese characters that gave us "manga" in Japanese. Manhwa have become among the most diverse and dynamic comics in Asia. What began as a paper phenomenon, serialised in magazines, newspapers or 100 page booklets available from a network of *manhwabangs* or rental libraries, has transformed in the 21st century into an explosion of addictive digital webtoons, downloaded in their millions every day. These changes parallel Hur Young man's career so far of nearly 50 years, during which he has authored more than 150,000 pages for over 100 series. Of these hits spanning science fiction, comedy, boxing, baseball, gambling, political history, teen romance and Korean cuisine 20 or so have been adapted into television shows, movies and games.

A youthful 70 this year, Mr. Hur remains in his prime, working on his latest project, a graphic documentary exploring our love affair with coffee. His original art draws crowds to gallery exhibitions in Seoul, Busan and Paris. It was after the packed opening of his French show at the Korean Cultural Centre that he gave this interview, made possible by Mattress Agency, Kim Junghee and Laurent Mélikian. Going from strength to strength, Mr. Hur's unrelenting dedication is proof that comics really are "a Young man's game".

COMIC HEROES: What prompted you to take up comics?

HUR YOUNG-MAN: I was born in 1947 in Yeosu on the south coast of Korea. I grew up in a family of eight children with an elder brother and sister who read a children's monthly containing comics. I naturally read them with them. My parents were busy traders who were very tolerant and let us read comics, even though they had a bad reputation. I have always drawn. In 1966, after graduating from high school, I left for Seoul, where I was apprenticed to manhwa authors for seven years. In 1974 I participated in a publisher's talent contest under my own name. Since then I have been working as a comics creator. I have the chance to do what I love. If there is a God, I thank him for it.

CH: You say that comics had a bad reputation when you were growing up?

HY: Indeed. In the late 1960s until the mid 1970s, on National Children's Day on May 5th, police officers would collect comics and adult films and burn them in public. I lived through this very hard period. We comics authors were in a constant struggle with the government to let us work in peace. In addition, we were looked down on; even the production quality of our books was poor. When we had successes, they tried to keep us down...

CH: Isn't censorship a problem you faced with your first hit, the masked hero Gaksital in 1974?

HY: Yes. Gaksital was designed for the rental libraries. Within three months, it was such a big success, it encouraged others to produce similar comics with masked heroes. And these led to the state censors asking me to stop my series. I asked why I had to stop producing Gaksital, and not the other designers. I was told that if I stopped, the others would do the same... Since the 1960s, there has been a lot of censorship in Korea. For example, you couldn't show a brother and a sister in the same bed due to moral issues related to Confucianism. Comics about sport were very successful, but it was difficult to propose a series on boxing because it was considered too violent. So we produced mainly baseball stories. Today censorship does not exist any more, but I compare it to a watermelon: if you grow a watermelon inside a square box, it will take the form of a cube. If you remove the box, the watermelon will stay like a cube for a long time. I think that Japanese manga have been so impressive because there was really no censorship there.

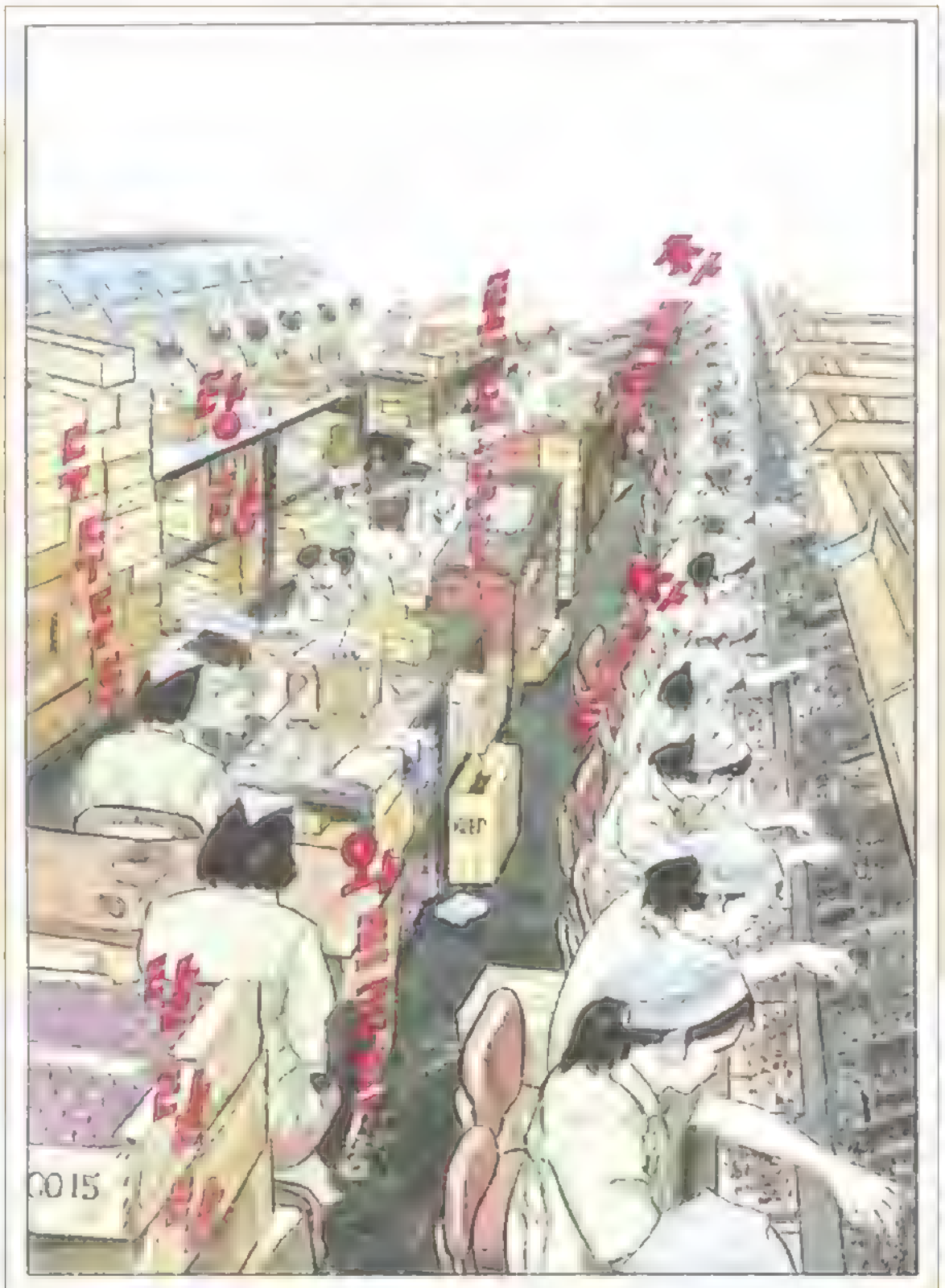
> *"The censors could say no for any unpredictable detail"*

Above: Pages from Mr Hur's early success *Gaksital* (literally "Bridal Mask") about a masked freedom fighter

Below: Hur Young man is still active after a career spanning more than 50 years.

CH: Is there really no censorship

Above: Mr Hur at work in his studio



Right: 1990's *The Wall* was Mr Hur's first series aimed at an adult audience

problem in Korean comics now?
HY: Sometimes sex is a problem. It has happened that an inexperienced attorney uses this pretext to prosecute a manhwa author and eventually abandons the case. Some still speak of a limit on freedom of expression. Personally I do not feel it.

CH: Gaksital is a sort of Korean Zorro, fighting injustices under the Japanese occupation of Korea in the '30s. Might this be seen as promoting resistance to all authoritarian powers, and hence the military government in power at that time?
HY: I don't think the Korean authorities who controlled us then were smart enough to see that. To get our comics published, we had to get them a synopsis of a few pages before starting production. For Gaksital, I explained that my story would show Koreans in a resistance movement against the Japanese and that the bourgeois and the people were united, an alliance I don't think the authorities liked. The censors could say no for any unpredictable detail. We devised strategies to avoid this. In boxing stories, for example, we couldn't show the impact of the hero's punch hitting his opponent. So to get around that, I split the one drawing into two panels, separating the two fighters, and it was passed.

Above: *Superboard* is Mr Hur's take on *Dragon Ball*, and has proved just as popular in Korea

CH: To create so many pages, you work with assistants?
HY: Yes, with apprentices. At one time I worked with 27 of them! It was too many. I think I have the largest number of apprentices who have become professionals themselves. Sometimes they're referred to as the "Hur man's gang". Normally I don't keep them too long. If they have talent and are original, they must seize their independence, even if I'd prefer them to keep helping me. One of my former apprentices is Yoon Tae ho, who became the very popular creator of the webtoons *Moss* and *Mosaeng*. I often ask him for technical advice about drawing on the computer.

CH: You began as an apprentice. What tasks did you have to do?
HY: I wanted to go to university to study Western painting but my family had financial problems and couldn't afford to send me. I wrote to many prospective comics teachers and I was hired first by Park Moon yun, who is not that famous in the history of manhwa. My first task was to dilute the sticks of black Chinese ink, very time consuming getting

a small container of ink was a whole day's work. The second job consisted of filling in the flat areas of his artwork in black. Then there were the sets to draw and working on the scenario, and only then could we became professional. So there are four stages, but I was lucky, my teachers saw that I was talented and I skipped the first two. I was an exceptional case. The older apprentices hated me.

CH: Once you became a professional, could the cost of apprentices be problematic?

HY: Yes, the publishers provided us with advance payments to produce a dozen books, but in reality these covered only two books. We were often in difficulty. Also, between commissions my apprentices could rest, but they had to always be available. Here in Paris, I met graphic novelist Jacques Ferrandez, who told me to work alone. I dream about it. But to produce my four pages each day, I need a minimum of four apprentices...

CH: What were your influences?

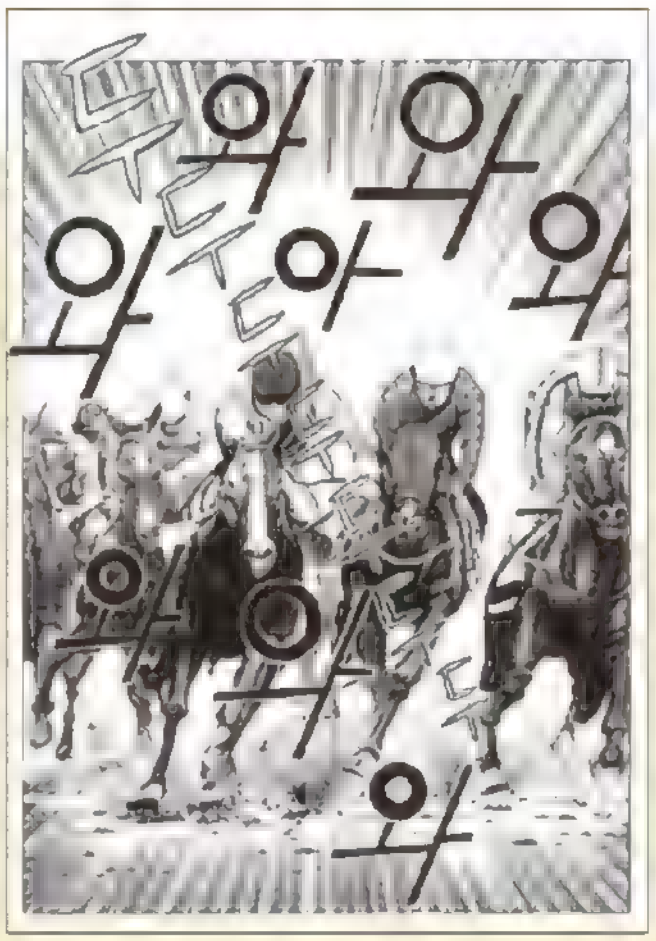
HY: In high school I liked the adventure and science fiction manhwa of Kim San ho. [*Born 1939, he continued his career from the late 1960s in the USA at Charlton Comics.*] I didn't like science fiction, but I greatly admire Japan's Osamu Tezuka and *Astro Boy*. In 1968 I was apprenticed to another artist, Lee Han wan. In his studio, I saw my first Japanese comics and I realised that some Korean series were traced and reversed from manga. This explains the large number of left handed characters in our publications. Today, Japanese influence remains important in Korea, and around the world. Basically, copying before undertaking your own creations is a natural process.

CH: After suffering under the authorities, how did you come to be commissioned by them in 1988 for *Oh, Gang Han* ("Oh, Han River") about the confrontation between North and South Korea?

Above: *Oh, Gang Han* was commissioned by the South Korean authorities and created in collaboration with writer Kim Se-jeong

HY: This period corresponds to the ending of South Korea's military regime, when students were often demonstrating. One day my editor introduced me to a representative of the intelligence services. Their idea was to encourage people not to demonstrate any more by telling the story of a North Korean. I issued my conditions. I told them that until now their propaganda depicted the Communists crudely as bloodthirsty. No intellectual could believe in such propaganda. I asked them to trust me and not to interfere in my creation. They wanted to use me and I wanted to use them. I didn't devise a story to prevent demonstrations. I wanted to introduce students to the deeper context of the post war period and explain the expectations of the Communists. My hero is a serf working for a rich family before independence. When war broke out, he joined the North before being taken prisoner by the South.

Below: Sports are a hugely popular topic for manhwa, particularly baseball, but violence is controversial, as Mr Hur found when he chose to depict boxing too



Above: The remarkably broad range of Korean manhwa is reflected in Mr Hur's work, from *Sikgaek* ("The Gourmet", above left) to "Today is Horse Day" (centre) to "Beat" (right)

Later his son becomes an activist. *Oh, Gang Han* covers a thousand pages. In colleges, everyone read it. I couldn't go to university but thanks to this series I felt like a student. In the end, I don't know if my story encouraged them more or less to march down the street. But I reached my goal, to write a political history.

CH: What response did you get from the intelligence services about *Oh, Gang Han*?
HY: Nothing. Except on one occasion: I had drawn the hero on a full page in front of the North Korean flag. A policeman called to see if it was me who had produced that drawing. He said, "Be careful!" That warning was the only time they intervened.

CH: You choose a wide variety of topics. With *Sikgaek* ("The Gourmet", 2002-08) you seem to have found a powerful subject in Korean gastronomy...
HY: When I started thinking about a series on food, I was thinking only about kimchi [*fermented vegetables used in Korean cuisine*]. After some research, I learned there are over 150 kinds of kimchi and it is only a side dish. As a subject it was too limited, as I wanted to talk about food in general, alcoholic beverages included. Food represents history and culture. Three times a day, everyone wonders, "What am I going to eat?" And family ties are intimately linked to food. I concentrated on this line while presenting the variety of regions of Korea where I travelled. To deal with the maximum topics, I tried to write short episodes to publish two per month, at a rate of four pages a day in the *Dong A Ilbo* newspaper. It was an exciting job.

For me, the saddest dish from this country comes from the West coast, where there is not much to eat in summer. Small conical shells are used, which are crushed before being cooked. It didn't taste great, but the people from the area had a lot of fun seeing this story.

CH: Did you go to North Korea?
HY: Yes, but I was prevented from meeting people. I was offered interviews with chefs from the big hotels, but it did not make sense, so I refused. I didn't want to omit the North. So I went to China, close to the North Korean border. In one episode, I approach the question by showing a character from the North who adds pork to his kimchi.

CH: You're working on a series about coffee. Why this topic?
HY: A series needs a topic that interests a wide audience. I'm interested in wine, but the Japanese manga *The Drops of God* by Shin Kibayashi has become the reference on this subject. If I'd also embarked on wine, I'd have been accused of plagiarism. Finally, my son gave me the idea of coffee, which young Koreans love. Then, while hiking, I met people who were carrying their own espresso machine, and wondered why they made so much effort to make coffee. I ended up learning about the basics of coffee, and today I understand them better and I do not drink instant coffee. Without being addicted, I drink very weak coffee. My doctor forbids me to drink it any stronger.

Below: A story note from Mr Hur's notebook Several of his works have been adapted into films and TV series

ON SALE NOW

Your essential **132-page** guide
to the best films ever made

www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/film

COMICS WE RATE

RATINGS EXPLAINED

SPACE MARINES

ELDAR

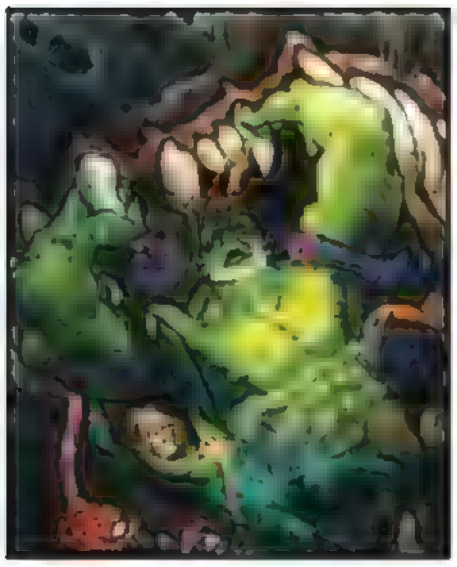
ORKS

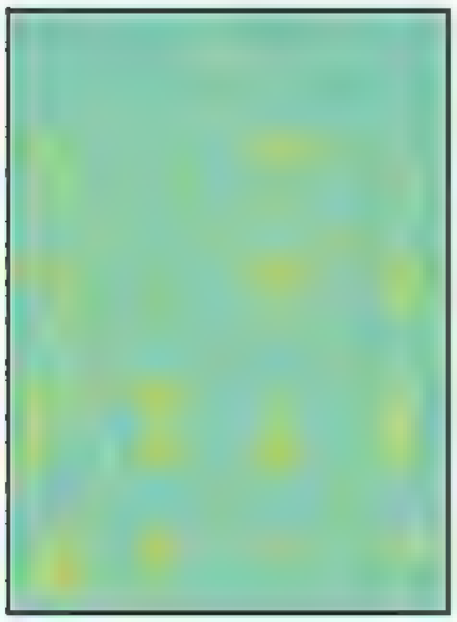
KROOT

SQUATS

The next 13 pages are crammed with reviews of the latest comics and graphic novels...

108 Batwoman Rebirth
108 Midnighter & Apollo
108 Trinity Rebirth
108 Super Sons Rebirth
108 JLA Rebirth
110 Inhumans Vs X-Men
110 Monsters Unleashed
110 Champions
110 Hulk
110 Thanos
112 Hadgon Hall
112 Seven To Eternity
113 Death Be Damned
113 The Wild Storm
114 Moonshine
114 The Dregs
115 The Spirit
115 Trekker
116 Warhammer 40K
116 Kamandi Challenge
117 Darkness Visible
117 Herman By Trade
118 Mayday
118 Anno Dracula
118 Empowered
119 Pretending Is Lying
120 October Faction
120 KISS: The Demon
120 The Magdalena





Batwoman is so full of episodic flashbacks, it's a pretty trippy read.

It remains to be seen if this League is premier. Or anything to do with justice.

DC Rebirth round-up

***Batwoman Rebirth* is fantastic but, weirdly, the opening issue is difficult to recommend, especially to die-hard Batwoman fans.** That's mainly because they'll have seen (and read) it all before. The structure, formed almost entirely of flashbacks, is so dependent on retelling Kate Kane's origin story, there's little fresh information here. But for new readers it's an absolute dream – an elegant 'previously on" that'll make you feel like an expert by the time you hit the last page. Those final moments are exciting, operating as a sort of teaser trailer for anyone who's read the previous titles, those fans who've been patiently waiting for something new, but it's too little, too late. That said, it's comforting that Rebirth isn't reinventing the Bat wheel but leaving all the essential elements of Kane's character in place, so we'll definitely be adding it to our pull list in the hope there are more surprises on the way.

Another Rebirth book that's dedicated to staying true to its characters, *Midnighter & Apollo*, contains far more originality than *Batwoman*, including a startling opening action set piece (tracking Midnighter as he fights his way through a train) that'll genuinely give you goosebumps. Midnighter's fantastic solo series may have been cancelled, but it was almost worth losing that book to gain this six issue miniseries, which is as gorgeous, gory, heartfelt and moving as Midnighter and Apollo's relationship itself. But don't expect the pair to go Dutch in terms of plot: this is definitely more Midnighter focused, told from his perspective, with the main villain having deep ties to the character's creation. Writer Steve Orlando clearly cares about both heroes, but his heart belongs to the night. It might not be an even split, but this is the best book involving both characters since Warren Ellis' *Authority*, and is an essential buy for fans.

> "YOU'RE IN THE HANDS OF A MASTER STORYTELLER HERE"

Midnighter and Apollo were so 'inspired" by Batman and Superman, it feels weird to have them on the same imprint as the original caped crusaders, but luckily the old guard are holding their own against the new boys, especially in *Trinity*, which brings the big two together with Wonder Woman for the most iconic triple threat in comics. It's arguably the best Rebirth title currently available, perfectly balancing not just the three leads but their past, present and future, too. Whether it's Clark gently ribbing Bruce about the time he wore a rainbow Bat suit ('I have no recollection of this," Bruce replies firmly), Wonder Woman and Lois Lane connecting over their shared strength, or a classic Batman villain whose evil plan closely resembles a classic Superman tale, there's real

history in this beautiful book. It's hard to describe without ruining some shocking twists scattered throughout the opening six issues, so you're just going to have to trust us when we tell you that you're in the hands of a master storyteller here. Superstar creator Francis Manapul is a one-man trinity on cover, script and art duties, and this unified approach produces truly stunning, intricate, auteur-esque results.

Trinity features glimpses at Superman's son, Jon, who's the co-lead of another brilliant book, *Super Sons*, which teams Superboy with Damian Wayne's Robin, to thrilling effect. Delayed from the original September 2016 release date, shifting to February 2017, it was worth the wait – this is a comic confident and audacious enough to include a visual tribute to Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns*. But don't expect the blockbusting antics of that graphic novel; this is as down-to-earth as first issues get, with one of the central action set-pieces involving a snowball fight. These initial (relatively) low stakes are probably because this is a comic focusing on a realistic portrayal of a growing friendship/rivalry between two kids. Special kids, sure, but kids all the same. Damian might be old beyond his years and Jon may have burgeoning superpowers, but these are children everyone can identify with, with Superboy and Robin possessing both the naivety and arrogance of youth, perfectly.

Justice League Of America has a lot less youth (in fact, this is the most grizzled team since Suicide Squad) but the book was similarly delayed from 2016 into 2017. Spun off from the *Justice League Vs Suicide Squad* miniseries, this feels more like an event book than the event book that proceeded it, with large-scale action and gimmicky villains (The Extremists, Marvel parodies last glimpsed in Grant Morrison's *Multiversity*) forming the basics for much of the narrative. It's a weird team, including Batman, Black Canary, Killer Frost, the Ray, Vixen, the Atom and Lobo – taking it about as far as possible from the core DC group that led Bryan Hitch's most recent take.

Of these, Lobo comes off the worst, underwritten and underused, which is a real shame – he's potentially the most exciting character in the line-up, but, as of this opening issue, we're not entirely sure why he's there. Meanwhile, Caitlin Snow and The Atom feel more like their CW television counterparts than anything we've seen in comics before, which takes some getting used to. But at least Batman – this team's leader – works (let's face it, it's a hard character to get wrong) and his relationship to Vixen is interesting. This is a dysfunctional group, one we hope will grow in time, but this book will have to deepen quickly if we're going to stick around long enough to see it happen, especially with so much quality competition. **Sam Ashurst**

Writers: Marguerite Bennett and James T. Tynion IV
Artist: Steve Epting
Colourist: Jeromy Cox
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★★

Writer: Steve Orlando
Artist: Fernando Blanco
Colourist: Romulo Fajardo, Jr
Format: Six-issue miniseries
Reviewed: Issues 1-5

★★★★

Writer: Francis Manapul
Artists: Francis Manapul with Emanuela Lupacchino, Ray McCarthy, Matt Santorelli
Colourist: [illegible]
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-6

★★★★★

Writer: Peter J. Tomasi
Artist: Jorge Jiminez
Colourist: Alejandro Sánchez
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★★★

Writer: Steve Orlando
Artists: Ivan Reis with Joe Prado, Oclair Albert and Julio Ferreira
Colourist: Marcelo Maiolo
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★

Marvel round-up

Poor Marvel supervillains. It's event time in the world of Marvel 616 and once again it is ' band of heroes vs. band of heroes". What does a villain have to do to get some air time?

This time it's the turn of the X Men to lose all sense for the sake of a crossover. With the Inhuman birthing Terrigen mists pushing mutants to the brink of extinction, the X-Men are forced to make a choice: abandon Earth, or fight the Inhuman royal family...

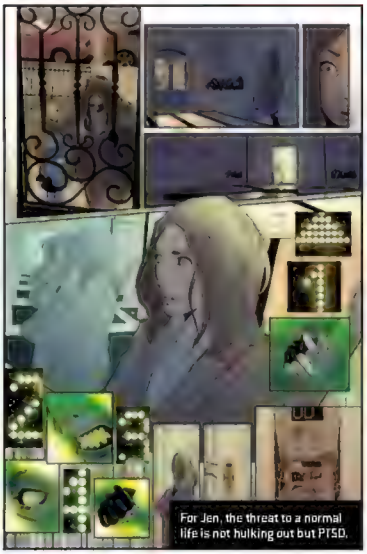
Thing is, with the X Men's history of planet hopping adventures and galactic allies, you'd think abandoning Earth would not be that much of a problem. Remember, they had an asteroid base once. But Marvel does what Marvel does, so here we are, with another dull clash between superhero teams that should know better, where very few characters come off as sympathetic.

IvX is not a good book. As in *Civil War II* and *Avengers vs X Men*, the manoeuvring involved to get two bands of superheroes to fight each other removes all of the characters' sense and empathy. When everything is a shade of grey, it is hard to attach yourself to characters and care about their plight. *IvX* does improve at its tail end as the focus shifts to NuHumans, new Inhumans who act a lot like the heroic X Men of old, but it's baffling to introduce so many new Inhumans while casual fans are still getting to grips with the old ones. With two issues remaining, there is some hope Lemire, Soule and Yu can turn things around, but for now this is another pointless event that leaves hardcore fans cold and new fans confused. If Marvel are hoping to lean into the fuss about Inhumans "replacing" mutants in the canon, they need to work harder than this.

> "ANOTHER DULL CLASH BETWEEN HEROES WHO SHOULD KNOW BETTER"

On the flip side of the event coin is *Monsters Unleashed*, in which the Inhumans and the X Men can be found teaming up with Marvel's other heroes, fighting all manner of monsters and kaiju like figures called Leviathans. *Monsters* isn't clever, but it certainly is BIG. Steven Niven's artwork drives the first issue's tale, updating the baddies from '50s and '60s monster movies and giving them a 2017 shine. Fun, frothy and completely throwaway, *Monsters* is an enjoyable jaunt if you miss watching Marvel's biggest and brightest acting like heroes again.

This works doubly so in the *Champions* tie in event, where



Jeremy Whitley gives us a tale that reads like classic early '90s X-Men, in a good way, as our hero team faces off against a batch of villains with loads of chicanery and shenanigans and civilians in peril. Lovely stuff.

Personal battles

Classic villainy also takes a back seat in the stunning new run on *Hulk*: a Hulk story where no one hulks up. Instead the great baddie in Mariko Tamaki's new conceit is PTSD. With Banner off the table and Jennifer Walters still recovering from the effects of *Civil War II*, the big bad in the new *Hulk* is... nothing. The great gnawing void of nothing that comes with any traumatic experience. Come for the law stories, stay for Tamaki's nuanced depiction of a character's battle with anxiety. This is a Hulk book where you are actively rooting against the hero hulking up. It could turn out to be one of the most vital Hulk books in years.

We do have time for one villain – perhaps *the* villain of the Marvel universe. Thanos is back for another solo run, and this time the Mad Titan is on the lam after being diagnosed with what can only be described as a "God Cancer". So Marvel finally have a book with a classic supervillain... but have made him more vulnerable and pitted him against other cosmic villains as led by his Inhuman son Thane.

Thanos stories always lend themselves well to planet-hopping battles, mixed in with ponderings on the nature of good and evil in the Marvel universe, and the creative team of Lemire and Deodato handle the Mad Titan well. Seeing him brought low, working in the shadows, raging at the dying of the light is a welcome change of pace, and while you do not feel sorry for Thanos, you do feel... something. Deodato's decision to have much of the book covered in darkness, only to come aflame in massive action scenes, is an inspired one. Already you feel this book will have major ramifications on the cosmic scale of Marvel.

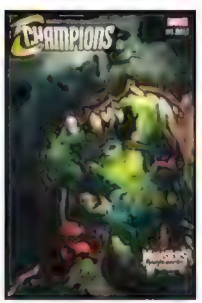
Villains dying. Villains being replaced by human problems, cartoon monsters or infighting heroes. Feel sorry for the Marvel villains. At this rate, they may just end up out of work soon... **Carl Anka**

Writers: Charles Soule, Jeff Lemire
Artists: Leinil Francis Yu, Gerry Alanguilan
Colourist: David Curiel
Format: 7 issue miniseries
Reviewed: Issues 1-4

★★☆☆☆

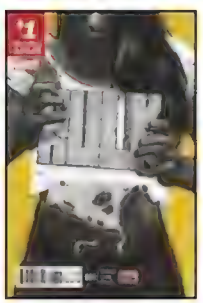
Writer: Cullen Bunn
Artists: Various
Colourist: David Curiel
Format: 5 issue miniseries
Reviewed: Issues 1-3

★★★☆☆



Writer: Jeremy Whitley
Artists: Robbie, Ted Brandt
Colourist: Frank D'Armata
Format: One shot
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★★☆☆



Writer: Mariko Tamaki
Artists: Nico Leon, Dalibor Talajic
Colourist: Matt Milla
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-3

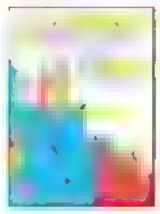
★★★★☆

Writer: Jeff Lemire
Artist: Mike Deodato
Colourist: Frank Martin
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-4

★★★½☆

Haddon Hall

Writer/Artist: Ne¡b
Publisher: Se fMadeHero
Format: Graph c nove
★★★½



David Bowie's passing last year – along with his astonishing final album, *Blackstar* – has led to a flurry of renewed interest in the pop godhead. This comic biography looks back to the transitional period where the young David made the transformation from long haired folkie to pioneering glam god. It is, effectively, *Bowie Begins*.

Nejib tells his tale from the point of view of the titular building, now demolished, then a grandiose old pile falling into decrepitude – and cheap enough for Bowie and his first wife, Angie, to move into. The young dude had already penned 'Space Oddity' but the song had yet to reach ubiquity (that would come when it was attached to footage of the 1969 moon landing when broadcast in the UK) and he was growing increasingly weary of his many unsuccessful knocks on the door of fame. A series of encounters and a wild makeover courtesy of Angie – changes all of that...

The book isn't a straight biography. Nejib conflates, merges and, occasionally, plain makes up events (no, as far as we're aware Syd Barrett never lived with Dave and Angel), but this is a wittily told tale. Nejib has a great sense of space and architecture, even if his characters are occasionally a little hard to tell apart. There are some powerful moments of pathos, too, with Terry Burns – David's schizophrenic half brother – occasionally popping by. The popular image of Bowie in this period is of the ice cold sex god, casually shagging and drugging his way through stardom, but *Haddon Hall* does a fine job of reminding us of the man as well as the myth. **Will Salmon**

Seven to Eternity

Writer: R ck Remender
Artist: Jerome Opeña
Publisher: mage
Format: Ongo ng
Reviewed ssues 1-4
★★★★

There are few certainties in this life, but one is that every time Image announces a raft of new comics, Rick Remender's name will appear among them. His latest, *Seven to Eternity*, moves away from his sci fi roots into a fantasy world that is still Remender right down to the ground.

Thrust into a typically crapsack world where death and emotional dissolution crowd in on all sides, we meet the Osidis family, living in hiding from a sinister tyrant called the God of Whispers. When they are finally tracked down, a son must take up his father's mantle against the big bad in a setup that presents as standard fantasy epic but offers more.

Remender is never one to ease his reader into a story, and he doesn't here. The first issue ends up feeling somewhat rushed, the plot racing along, barely pausing for breath, Matt Hollingsworth's colour palette flattening Opeña's lush detail.

Fortunately, the creators soon find their stride, and the story becomes sharp, interesting and visually engaging, with a thorny snarl of moral conundrums at its heart. The villain – who promises your every desire and turns his people against each other – draws poignant (if on the nose) parallels to the politics of the day.

That *Seven to Eternity* is typical Remender means that the twists and turns are as hard to predict as ever. What results is an atmosphere of psychological as much as magical peril that separates it from the standard fantasy story on which it riffs. **Hugh Armitage**

Death Be Damned

Writers: Ben Acker, Ben Blacker, Andrew Miller
Artist: Hannah Christenson
Publisher: BOOM! Studios
Format: 4-issue series
Reviewed Issues 1-2

★★★☆☆

Revenge punctuates the Western: whether it's land or love, there's always something to fight over and someone to avenge. Fitting, then, that *Death Be Damned* opens on a hot rush of blood, as Miranda Coler wakes up one day to find her family murdered. Without any explanation, our only anchor is Miranda's steely promise of vengeance.

This fixation on the flesh is brought to life by Hannah Christenson's earthy art style. There is nothing delicate or wispy about *Death Be Damned*; faces drip from the page like candle wax and landscapes look as rough as hemp. In a supernatural twist, every time Miranda dies she is brought back to life, and the transition between life and death is signified when colourist Juan Useche's palette of burnt orange and brown blots into icy blue.

Visual flourishes aside, it's refreshing to see a woman take charge in a traditionally masculine narrative. In tales of the Old West, women are usually one of three things: damsels, dead or wives who stay at home while their men become heroes. Miranda takes on this mythic role, storming across the comic like a phantom of steel and bone in a ruffled dress.

The book is scintillating, but at times it fails to connect. With no real window into who Miranda is, it's difficult to care for her or sympathise with her plight. The plot also feels slippery, shifting between classic Western territory and zombie horror with no real focus. This creates a tangled story, but it's still a bold foundation for future issues. **Kimberley Margaux**

A down-to-earth woman will experience the unearthly.
GRRRR...!
Rest both your souls. I love you, James. Martha
That's why I'm gonna do what I'm gonna do

The Wild Storm

Writer: Warren Ellis
Artist: John Davis-Hunt
Colourist: Ivan Plascencia
Publisher: DC
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed. Issues 1-2

★★★★★

Angela Spica wants to make the world a better place. I.O. want to make the world safer. Jacob Marlowe wants to remake the world. I.O. want him dead. Fate has other plans.

In the 1990s, Wildstorm was king. The Image Comics owned universe was a world of secretive intelligence agencies, alien conspiracies, superpowered spies and UN-sponsored superheroes. Like everything, it outstayed its welcome a little but was great fun for a long, long time. Now it's back and it's better than ever.

The 24 issues Warren Ellis is signed on for will unfold in four stories of six parts. This first one opens with an undeniable, real, superhuman event above New York City. I.O. want answers, so does Marlowe, so does I.O.'s assassin and so does Angela Spica. All of them converge in a manner that feels realistic and grounded and at the same time quietly hopeful. This is a story about a world that's about to get much more interesting, and there's joy fizzing under Jon Davis-Hunt's elegant lines.

This is the work Ellis cut his teeth on, and it shows. It's tightly plotted, idea-heavy and very funny in places. The art is a vital part of that success, with both Davis-Hunt and colourist Ivan Plascencia giving the world the realism it needs. Rounded out by Simon Bowland's expert lettering, this is a textbook example of how to do a reboot and do it well. So strap in, because it looks like *The Wild Storm* is going to be one hell of a ride. **Alasdair Stuart**

Moonshine

Writer: Brian Azzarello
Artist: Eduardo Risso
Publisher: Image
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-5

★★★

The *100 Bullets* writer-artist team of Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso have reunited for a rather different era of hardboiled crime. This time they find themselves in Prohibition era America, telling a story about a hooch brewer and the New York gangsters who have unwisely decided that they want the booze.

The book focuses on Lou Pirlo, an alcoholic henchman sent to the Deep South to talk Hiram Holt into giving his boss a share of his hooch business. He soon finds himself embroiled in the violent actions of the Holt family, and hunted by the werewolf who stalks the woods.

The underbelly that Azzarello and Risso create here is suitably murky, with explosions of extreme violence depicted with a black and red palette. The sprawling cast of gangsters and members of the Holt family can be hard to keep track of, but Azzarello makes sure you have all the essential information when you need it.

Even five issues in, though, it's still not entirely clear what's going on. Lou's alcoholic blackouts may or may not have a more monstrous explanation, someone's definitely a werewolf, and there's a psychic lady who can talk to the dead. Azzarello has a habit of throwing readers into the deep end and letting them fend for themselves, but this time the sense of disorientation is alienating and, rather than feeling sucked into a baffling world, you feel more like you're standing outside of it, waiting for the creators to pull back the curtain on a reveal that will finally make sense of everything. **Abigail Chandler**

The Dregs

Writers: Zac Thompson, Connie Nadler
Artist: Eric Zawadzki
Colourist: Dee Cunniffe
Publisher: Black Mask Studios
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

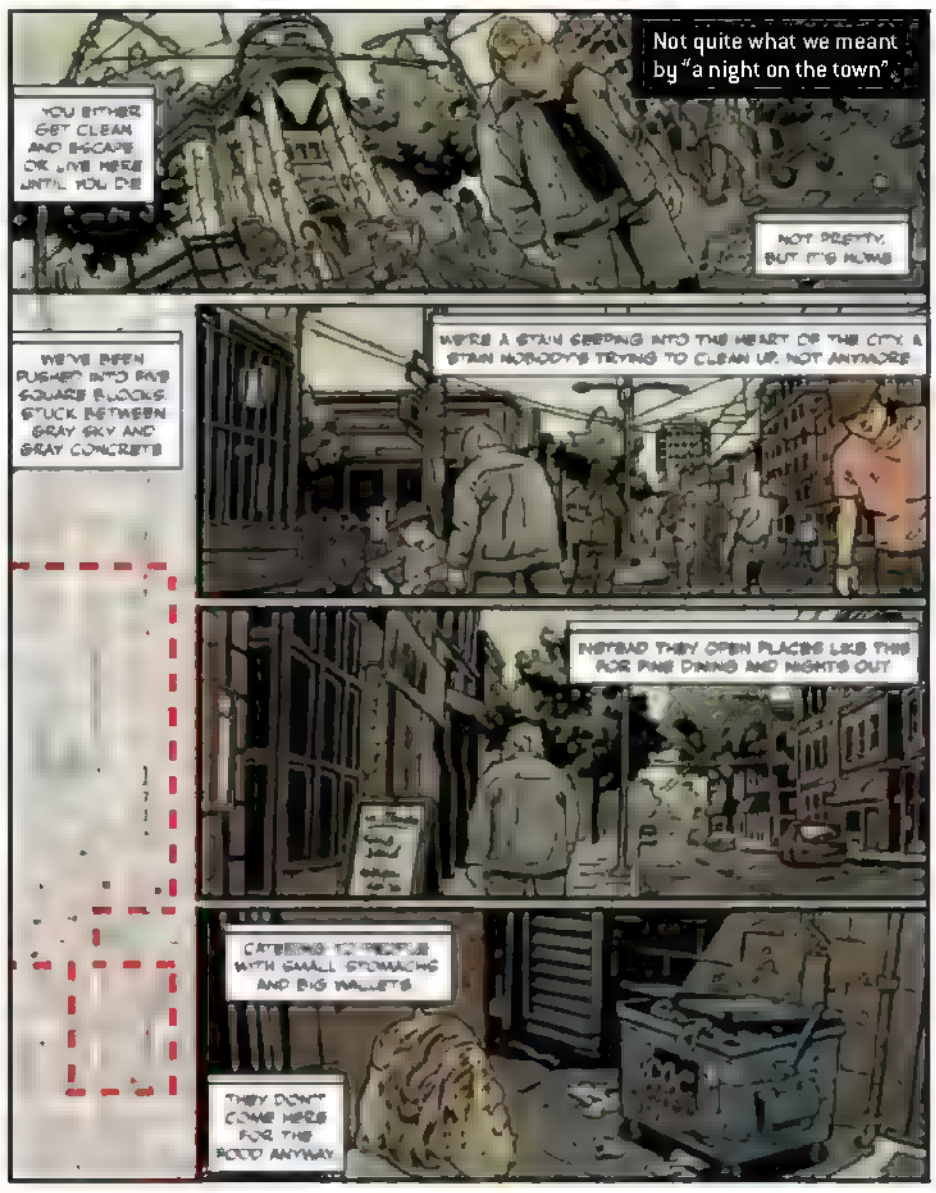
★★★★

The cost of gentrification is explored in this biting new satire where the rich literally eat the poor and desperate.

Set in Vancouver (an interesting quirk coming as it does just months after Ed Brisson's miniseries *The Violent*, which explored similar issues of poverty and drugs in the same location), it's a grimy, street set murder mystery. Albert is a homeless drug addict, but he's noticed that his friends have started to go missing. The police are blaming it on the increasing number of drug overdoses on the street, but could there be a more sinister reason? Obsessed with pulp noir novels, Albert nicknames himself Marlowe and starts to investigate...

The answer to the mystery is clear from the off – issue 1 opens with a man being pumped full of drugs, then decapitated and left to drain on a meat hook – so we're ahead of Albert, but Nadler and Thompson's script does a fine job of getting into our strung out hero's head. Zawadzki's characters have a touch of Charlie Adlard about them, but it's his almost apocalyptic – and distressingly real – portrayal of the city that stays with you. There's some inventive layouts too, while Cunniffe colours the piece with a murky mix of greys and browns that's so tangibly dirty you may feel like you need to wash your hands afterward.

There's no subtlety in the metaphor here, but there is a palpable anger at the state of a city both rising in economic value and becoming increasingly difficult for many people to actually live in. **Will Salmon**


Not quite what we meant by "a night on the town".
YOU EITHER GET CLEAN AND ESCAPE OR LIVE HERE UNTIL YOU DIE
NOT PRETTY, BUT IT'S HOME
WE'RE A STAIN CREEPING INTO THE HEART OF THE CITY. A STAIN NOBODY'S TRYING TO CLEAN UP. NOT ANYMORE.
WE'VE BEEN PUSHED INTO FIVE SQUARE BLOCKS STUCK BETWEEN GRAY SKY AND GRAY CONCRETE
INSTEAD THEY OPEN PLACES LIKE THIS FOR FINE DINING AND NIGHTS OUT
CATERING TO PEOPLE WITH SMALL STOMACHS AND BIG WALLETS
THEY DON'T COME HERE FOR THE FOOD ANYWAY

The Spirit

Writer: Francesco Francav a
Artist: Francesco Francav a
Colourist: Francesco Francav a
Publisher: Dynam te
Format: 5- ssue m n series
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★★★

This loving ode to one of Will Eisner's most famous creations is clearly a passion project for Francesco Francavilla. It's dedicated sweetly to the memory of both Eisner himself and Darwyn Cooke (who has previously drawn the character), and the influence of both is keenly felt throughout.

"The Corpse-Makers" begins as a routine investigation for the Spirit, but soon moves into the realms of a conspiracy thriller. Precisely what the conspiracy is has yet to be revealed, but it links a series of missing persons cases and the valuable "crimson coal" – a vital energy source for Central City, but also one that appears to have potentially toxic side-effects.

But enough about the plot because the chief draw here is undoubtedly Francavilla's jaw-dropping pencils and the rich, midnight hues of his colour work. Virtually every panel here is awash with rain and thick with shadows, while beautiful vintage cars tear through the city streets and shady figures smoke in back alleys. Francavilla's previous work – notably on *Afterlife With Archie* – has shown a love and affinity for pulp, but this is a headlong dive into a heady, atmospheric world.

Sure, it's perhaps overly traditional in its storytelling and it's not doing anything radically new, but what it does do it does gloriously, working as both a fine starting point for Spirit newbies, an entertaining tale in its own right, and a fitting homage that will please fans. **Will Salmon**

Trekker

Writer/Artist: Ron Randa
Publisher: Dark Horse
Format: Graph c nove

★★★

***Trekker* – not to be confused with the fandom of a certain very popular space franchise – was a late-'80s SF series originally published by Dark Horse and then Image, set in the 23rd century on a remote, run-down planet called New Gelaph.** Its protagonist, Mercy St. Clair, is a bounty hunter whose hard-bitten exterior hides a heart that's... well, also fairly hard-bitten but not entirely beyond redemption.

One of the pleasures of reading the original series was creator Ron Randall's vision of a grubby, lived-in future universe; even if his figurework might be a little stiff, thanks to his strong design sense and classic illustrative style Mercy's world always seemed tangibly real, which in turn made her search for meaning and purpose all the more credible and compelling.

Now, some 30 years on, Randall returns to the character with *Rites Of Passage*, which is being published as a graphic novel but shows clear indications of having been conceived as a three-part miniseries, not least because each of its three chapters is told from a different narrative viewpoint.

Mercy is persuaded, against her better judgement, to help protect a teenage girl, Jekka, who is being targeted by cyborg assassins. The job takes her – along with resistance fighter Jason Bolt and mysterious robed Jedi-alike Wisuu – off-planet, with the bad guys in hot pursuit. Offering a reasonably neat twist towards the end, this is a straightforward and effective piece of outer-space pulp which places few demands upon readers other than to just sit back and enjoy. **James Lovegrove**

Warhammer 40K fans will love it. Newbies may feel a bit lost.

Warhammer 40,000

Writer: George Mann
Artist: Taz o Bett n
Publisher: T tan
Format: Ongo ng
Reviewed: ssues 1-4

★★★½

Games Workshop's Warhammer 40,000 games setting has been with us since 1987. Gothic aesthetics, iconic Space Marines and over the top violence have earned it a place in the pantheon of popular sci fi universes. Beyond an info dump about the mission, these issues assume you know the history of the Imperium. Fans can expect a few Easter Eggs: an orang utan like Jokaero, the deployment of Imperial Knights, and one of our viewpoint characters wearing the beaky Mark VI ' Corvus" armour.

George Mann's sparsely worded story sees the Dark Angels visit the Calaphrax Cluster after 10,000 years away, conscious it conceals a secret from the past.

It's fatiguing to read characters talk in *proclamations* like ' Suffer not the warpspawn to live!" But this is core to the cyber medieval vibe and you get used to it. It can be a challenge sympathising with grandiose, masked characters, but the comic strives to make you care by ditching the vast armies of the game and zooming to the personal level. It succeeds especially well with cynical faux Elizabethan inquisitor Sabbathiel.

The art is vivid, glowing with a curiously retro quality. Some gory panels aside, it's a fraction too bright and cartoon like given the bleak setting. We'll definitely devour the next volume, but it's a slight affair so far; the character beats are a little understated and the narrative ends abruptly. Full of wonder, though: it works.

Dave Bradley

The Kamandi Challenge

Writers: Var ous
Artists: Var ous
Publisher: DC
Format: 12- ssue ser es
Reviewed: ssues 1-2

★★★★★

Some comic fans associate Jack Kirby most with Marvel. It makes sense he did his most high profile work there. However, he also contributed a significant amount to DC, including the New Gods saga, which still plays a major part in DC's mythology today. But it's his non mythic work that DC is celebrating with *The Kamandi Challenge*, which doubles as a loving tribute to both Kirby's legacy and spirit.

Ostensibly a reboot of one of Jack's fan favourite '70s titles (inspired by *Planet Of The Apes*, about the last boy on an earth now dominated by intelligent animals), the book has a special twist: over the course of its run, 14 different teams will create their own narrative, end it on a cliffhanger, then hand off to the next team in the roster.

The first issue contains two stories, with Dan Didio and Keith Giffen's opener featuring classic characters from the original, giant rats, and even a cameo from Kirby himself. Dan Abnett and Dale Eaglesham resolve Didio's ending elegantly, then construct their own dilemma.

Pete J Tomasi and Neal Adams' issue two includes an appearance from a significant piece of Kirby furniture, and all out war featuring a wide array of combatants (including tigers, apes and robots), leading to a fairly literal cliffhanger.

Fast, fun and thrilling *The Kamandi Challenge*'s focus on wild experimentation is the best possible tribute to Kirby, and if the opening issues are any indication, we're in for a fun ride. **Sam Ashurst**

A rotating cast of creatives aim to recapture that Kirby magic with *The Kamandi Challenge*.

Darkness Visible

Writer: Mike Carey and Arvind Ethan David
Artist: Brendan Cahill
Publisher: IDW
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★★★

The demons came just under a century ago. An uneasy peace has resulted in humanity and the Shaitan, the humans who choose to let their bodies host demons, living side by side. It's not going to last.

Detective Daniel Aston is one of a group of police officers who keep the peace. After interrupting a bank robbery by demon mob boss Ulescu's men, he's injured but escapes with his life. That too doesn't last. Not quite dead, not quite alive and with the life of his daughter on the line, Daniel Aston is suddenly a very powerful piece in a very old game – one where the prize is control of the world.

Mike Carey and Arvind Ethan David's script is witty and information heavy and doesn't hang around. Aston's racism, because that's what it is, is central to the plot, and they interrogate big issues without ever seeming lumpen or cheap. It's a nuanced, mature view of race relations that also involves demons punching people, and that's a truly pleasant surprise.

So is the art, Brendan Cahill's gloriously burly characters giving the action weight but still keeping it light on its feet. Shawn Lee's versatile lettering and Joana Lafuente's neon-slick nighttime colours help immensely too. This is London, just not our London – and although you may not want to stay, it's great fun to visit.

This is clever, innovative, nasty horror action storytelling from world-class creators. A must-read for Carey and urban fantasy fans alike. **Alasdair Stuart**

A smart, breathtaking thrill ride with added demons.

A kind of art meets a kind of life, head-on.

Herman By Trade

Writer/Artist: Chris W. Kim
Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Format: Graphic novel

★★★½

Herman's humdrum, solitary life as a big-city street-cleaner includes one secret: he has the ability to completely transform his appearance and, as "Bruce," he strides out into the city streets at night. What for is unclear, but people shrink from him and dogs bark at him as he passes. He also keeps up a running narration on what he is doing, reinforcing the artificiality. One night Bruce is there when enigmatic film auteur Mio issues a casting call for performers for her new film.

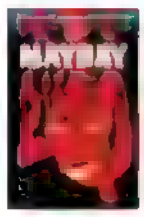
The queues are endless and the auditions go on for days; Herman's job, the rest of his life and the city's activities (seen as passing tableaus) all fall by the wayside. He eventually wins a part in the film but the outcome is not what anyone expected.

Chris W. Kim's elusive, thought-provoking story offers no easy answers, or even clear-cut questions. His ethereal, scritchy-scratchy art leaves characters ambiguous. Herman's ability is unsettling, as is his eagerness to sacrifice all to his ambition, but is he to blame or is he a victim of a hollow film industry that supplants talent with "illusions" and squanders the most magical of abilities? As art clashes with reality, identity with illusion, creative expression with creative control, we're left to make the moral choices that no-one in the story is willing to face. **Alex Summersby**

Mayday

Writer: Alex de Campi
Artist: Tony Parker
Publisher: Image
Format: 5-issue series
Reviewed: Issues 1-4

★★★★



Short of tying you up with a pair of tie-dye flares and beating you over the head with a bong, *Mayday* does everything it can to transport you back to the early '70s. Cold War tensions? Check. Hallucinogen fuelled sex? Check. Riot police brutally suppressing hippie protest? Check and check.

Mayday is the first of a proposed string of espionage miniseries that writer Alex de Campi describes as "Mad Men, but with considerably more murder". It follows a pair of Russian agents sent to the US to kill a defecting general who has a microfilm containing the names of every Soviet operative in the Far East. Known only by their codenames, Felix and Rose, the two are rumbled by the CIA and go on the run. Like Bonnie and Clyde, or perhaps Carril Ann Fugate and Charles Starkweather, they're young, desperate fugitives who leave a blood soaked trail, but our sympathies are with them all the same. In the heyday of the counterculture, anyone who resists The Man – however violently – becomes a hero.

De Campi peppers her script with a "soundtrack" of music suggestions to evoke mood and era, while Tony Parker, using a lean line reminiscent of Frank Quitely, provides Dutch angles, "off" framing and spacious compositions that echo the cinema of the period. The result is a compelling portrait of America turning sour, Woodstock giving way to Charles Manson, seen through the eyes of outsiders whose own ideals are becoming compromised.

James Lovegrove

Anno Dracula

Writer: Kim Newman
Artist: Paul McCaffrey
Publisher: Titan
Format: 5-issue series
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★★★

Horror, history and Count Dracula have long been the specialism of genre expert Kim Newman. His long running *Anno Dracula* series, which imagines an alt history with Drac as the Crown Prince of England, hits graphic novel format with a vibrant splash of ghouls and gore. In issue one we meet the female protagonists – journalist Kate, socialite Penny, gangland heiress Far Lo Suee and revolutionary princess Christina, every one of them cool and kick ass – as well the underground anarchists who oppose Dracula's deathly reign.

The first issue tantalisingly sets the Soho scene and teases fantastic beasts including a giant squid, killer mermaids and a certain creature from a lagoon. Newman's writing is witty and distinctive, while McCaffrey's panels bring lurid London to life. It's a killer start that's left us baying for more. **Rosie Fletcher**

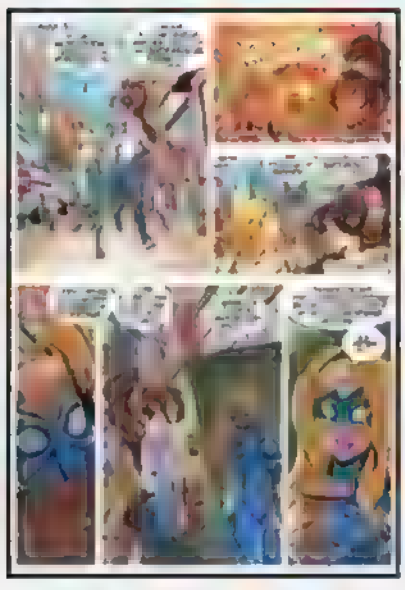
Empowered

Writer: Adam Warren
Artist: Kara Diaz
Publisher: Dark Horse
Format: 3-issue series
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★★★

It's so hard being a superhero sometimes! All that running before you've even had your morning coffee, and your costume ripping while you're trying to fight... *Empowered* may be nearing ten years old but it's as subversive and playful as ever. Superheroes are celebrities who drink too much, paperwork must be filled in after weapons or vehicles are deployed for battle, and Empowered is an everyday girl who always rips her suit in unfortunate places. It's laugh out loud hilarious, and whip smart.

The best thing in the series so far is glorious supervillain the Soldier Of Love. A prickly pink haired antiheroine who brandishes a magic wand like a vape pen, she's an evil Cupid who's stolen our hearts. **Kimberley Margaux**



Pretending Is Lying

Writer/Artist: Dominique Goblet
Publisher: New York Review Comics
Format: Graphic Novel

★★★★★

Some autobiographical comics deal with remarkable people and momentous events. Far too many are about boring lives or people you wouldn't actually want to spend time with. Then there are the ones, like *Pretending Is Lying*, that transform everyday experience into something magical and touching and breathtaking.

The episodic narrative explores Dominique's choppy, sometimes quite dysfunctional relationships – with her parents, particularly her blustering father; with her daughter Nikita; and with her lover Guy Marc (who is portrayed as unflinchingly as any of them, making it slightly surprising that he co-wrote the chapters in which he appears). All of them are needy, damaged, haunted by ghosts from their past – often depicted literally, sitting there right next to them or wafting around their heads.

Striking touches like that abound. Dominique Goblet is a master of her craft, and every element serves the storytelling – the varied art styles, differing calligraphy (Goblet did the lettering for the English translation herself) and subtle uses of colour. Everything works together seamlessly to bring each experience alive for the reader and take us on an emotional journey of redemption.

The art mocks the father's self-portrayal. Another character is depicted only as Munch's screamer.
Well...
But me Dominique What did i get from you ???
It's me... true or false ?
Didn't you have little sandwiches every day for school ?

The title is ironic: the character who says "pretending is lying" in the story is stridently belittling Nikita's creative spirit, but the introduction has already shown us how the "magic" of creativity can console and heal – and more: it's Goblet's creative reimagination of her life that transmutes it triumphantly into art, so that, like the bird that the cat drags in at the end of the book, "it seemed hurt, traumatised, almost dead, but in the end, it flew..." This book soars. A masterpiece. **Alex Summersby**

But when she left me and had her escapades in the Ardennes, WHERE did she stay ?
And don't go and say you don't know him !!!
That doesn't concern me ! Yeah, that doesn't concern me ! LOOK at how you are ! That doesn't concern me !
That doesn't concern me .. You've ALWAYS been a team with her !!! That doesn't concern me ..
She really raised you against me
And you just abandoned me !
Subtle touches in art and calligraphy add emotional depth.

New #1s

Ghostbusters 101 (IDW)
Worlds collide as the new and old Ghostbusters continuities merge, with some okay jokes.

Riverdale (Archie Comics)
Another new spin on Archie, this time in the TV continuity. Enjoyably angsty.

Underwinter (Image)
Ray Fawkes writes and draws this grisly new horror book with startling, beautiful art.

Valiant High (Valiant)
Lightly amusing reinvention of Archer & Armstrong and other Valiant heroes.

October Faction is dark but very light-hearted.

October Faction

Writer: Steve Niles
Artist: Damien Worm
Colourist: Damien Worm, Alyza Zherno
Publisher: DW
Format: 5-issue series
Reviewed: Issues 1-5

★★★★

Steve Niles is no stranger to the horror genre, having made a bloody mark with his vampires in Alaska tale *30 Days Of Night* with Ben Templesmith.

'Deadly Season', the latest volume of *The October Faction*, reunites Niles with Damien Worm to tell the continuing tale of the Allan family. Like a cross between The Addams Family and Justice League Dark, the Allans include a witch, a warlock and a thrill killer amongst their number. After 30 years of monster hunting, Frederick Allan has retired to become a teacher, while also hiding out from the enemies he's amassed over three decades.

Niles's dialogue is witty throughout, and over the first few issues he doesn't waste time, cutting straight to the chase as Frederick is found by a group of monster kids seeking revenge for the death of their parents. At times a little tongue in cheek, his lightness of touch will raise a smile from the weariest of horror fans.

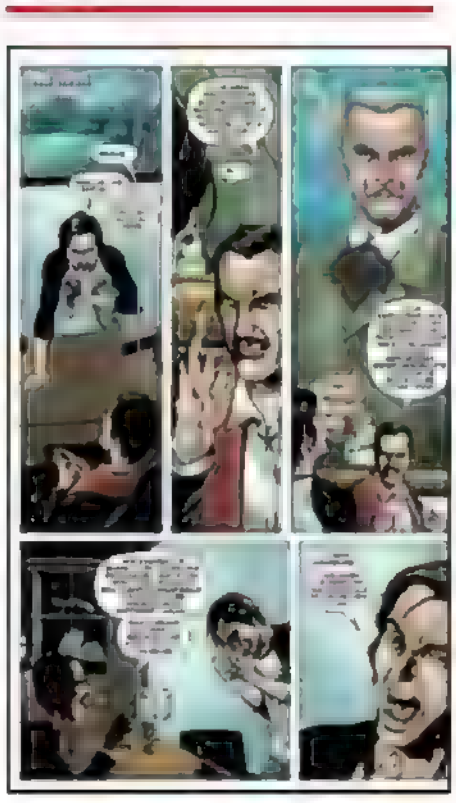
Worm's sumptuous gothic artwork is highly stylised, jagged edges piercing through every panel. The colour work is impressive too, cutting through the dark – deathly white faced demons, blood red spatters and the glint of sharpened fangs pop through the gloominess.

Although *October Faction* sits firmly within the horror genre, at its heart is a story of family, trust and that age old theme of the younger generation taking up the baton. **Claire Lim**

Kiss: The Demon

Writers: Amy Chu, Erik Burnham
Artist: Eman Casallos
Publisher: Dynamite
Format: 4-issue series
Reviewed: Issues 1-3

★★



A limited-run prequel to the ongoing Dynamite series, *KISS: The Demon* is aimed squarely at the teenage market (though you wonder how many teens today will have even heard of KISS). The main title is set in a dystopian future and *The Demon* sets out to explain how the world and its protagonists ended up in such a bad way. It takes place in Iowa as three fans form a band and set dark events in motion.

Corporate intrigue, love rivalries and the parent *Kiss* title loom large, and to begin with it's all a bit of a romp. However, by issue 3 things have become muddled and the pace begins to stutter as Chu employs too many captioned time jumps ("Two hours later", "Almost exactly one year later", etc), giving the impression of things being rushed and of too much being crammed into one issue. **Rob Lane**

The Magdalena

Writers: Tini Howard, Ryan Cady
Artist: Christian D Bar
Colourist: Mike Spencer
Publisher: Top Cow
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★½

This revival of a character from '90s horror comic *The Darkness* plays out like a more religious take on *Buffy*.

Patience is the Magdalena – the latest in a lineage of demon battling nuns. But after fighting the forces of evil for centuries, her time is nearly up. Enter Maya, a teenage girl who may just be her replacement – if she can survive long enough.

Seeing things through Maya's eyes is a sensible approach – it's very easy for newbies to jump on board with this okay opener. The book crams in a lot of setup, but manages to do so in an entertaining fashion – even if DiBari's scrappy art and the murky colours don't mark it out as the most visually appealing book. **Will Salmon**

SFX

THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE SCI-FI AND FANTASY MAGAZINE

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL 2
CHRIS PRATT, ZOE SALDANA AND JAMES GUNN TALK SEQUEL!
SFX
No.1 SCI-FI
ON SET AND EXCLUSIVE
"It's more adventure-led!"
DOCTOR WHO
GETS BACK TO BASICS
Peter Capaldi, Pearl Mackie and Steven Moffat in the ONLY series 10 coverage you need...
MASSIVE NEW TV AND
AMERICAN GODS
STAR WARS
MARVEL'S IRON FIST EXCLUSIVE
SFX
20 YEARS OF BUFFY
BLOCKBUSTER SEASON STARTS HERE!
KONG

LATEST ISSUE

ON SALE NOW!

myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/sfx

STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

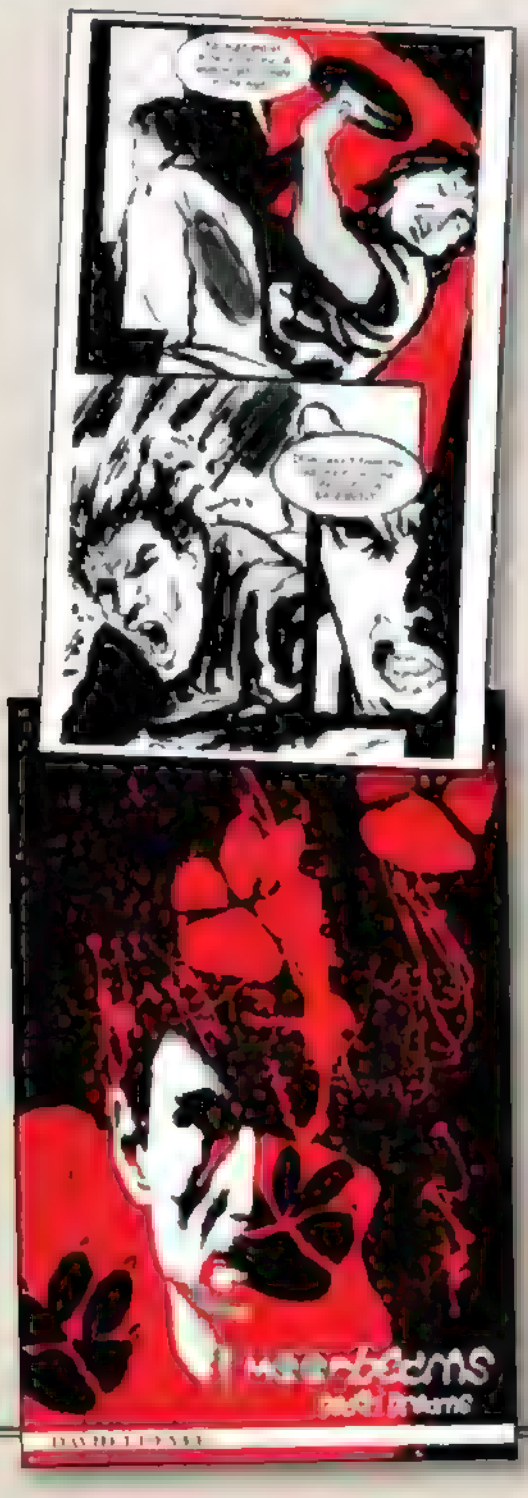
Miles Hamer picks out some of the best self-published comics right now. If you have created a comic, in print or online, we'd love to hear from you! Get in touch at *stateofindependents@gmail.com*

MOONBEAMS, DEATH DREAMS

Story by David J. Heyer
Art by Lou Manna
Lettering by Jaymes Reed
battleaxproductions.com

David Heyer's dark fable of a very bad upbringing and its very bad repercussions makes for a modern gangster noir full of volatile flair, chronicling the psychotic savagery of Alex Klinger's murderous rampage through life. There's a disconcerting beauty at the heart of all the carnage, thanks to Lou Manna's stark artwork and occasional splashes of claret across the panels.

Its monochromatic squalor suggests shades of Will Eisner's groundbreaking graphic novel *A Contract With God*. But it's not long before the plot's fangs fully puncture the domestic disharmony, and everything goes a bit cardiac-arrest. This book has been released as the showpiece for Heyer's new independent self-publishing house, and the stable are constantly on the lookout for new talent. Get in touch with them over at **battleaxproductions.com**



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE ARCHETYPE?

Story by Stu Perrins **Art by** Ron Gravelle
www.insanecomics.com

As the story of an alien superhero stranded on Earth, there's more than a hint of Krypton behind Stu Perrins' *The Archetype*. It's a biographical rundown of a hero's lifespan from the POV of the now octogenarian crime-fighter, recalling his adventures as a costumed day-saver. Featuring wartime shenanigans, star-crossed lovers, and the occasional fall along the way, it's a big tale to din a personable, affectionate manner. Gravelle's art is detailed and clean, whilst Perrins' occasionally mournful tale nevertheless offers the reader a reassuring hug across the pages. Charming

CHICKEN OUTFIT

Story by Joe Deagnon & Kirby Stasyna
Art by Joe Deagnon
chickenoutfit.com

The bug-eyed antics of chicken-costumed loser Rusty McDoodle and his techno cally proficient but socially awkward green-nued friend Stan Munsun. A horror comics and splatter movies inspired, very adult gag packed scattergun scramble through an unhinged world of sexual dissatisfaction and homicidal pleasure pots, this is strictly not for kids. Add in a couple of oddballs who run an occult shop and a mad-eyed boss forever on the brink of insanity, and you have a comic that positively pops with wonky-eyed energy and underground cool. Few panels go by without some sort of

X-rated mischief, a trail of slime or drip of blood, and the hyper-caffeinated artwork thrums with the jittery vocality of a '90s death metal album cover

SMART BOMB!!

Story by Wil Overton
Contributors Neil Roberts, Philip M Jackson, Eddie Sharam, Jamie Woodhead
comixology.co.uk/Smart-Bomb-Level-1-2/digital-comic/328135

Get your coins ready and your 16-bit consoles booted up for *Smart Bomb!!*, Wil Overton's hyperactive nostalgia hammer for all things video game. A sugar rush celebration and gentle mockery of the interactive genre, it's crammed from 1-up to Game Over with parodies, silliness and ega-batting takes on 'cons galore

Overton knows his subject matter, as an ex video game concept artist himself So for pin-sharp satire on the medium – including the futility of mobile gaming, video game violence and boss battles – wrapped up in a loud burst of precise detail, press start on *Smart Bomb!!* now!

TRANSFER

Story by Matt Garvey **Art by** Eder Messian
Mattgarvey.co.uk

Mind-swapping and mind-blowing, Matt Garvey's action-packed punch of a sci-fi action thriller is a breathless page-turner. Concerning courier Steve and his very special package indeed, the story lurches from one thrilling calamity to the next, and rarely lets up pace across its frankly astonishingly drawn panels. The story is complemented perfectly by the bold vibrancy of Messian's captivating artwork, with a rich lushness to the beautiful colour saturation and moody mauves. It's a title that needs your eyeballs all over it.

We asked Garvey, prolific creator of *Chunks* and crime-fighter Cordelia Swift, now he's found the process of self-publishing "I love it; making comics is so much fun and everyone should do it! I know it is a cliché to say, but seriously, if I can make comics, anyone can. I have been incredibly fortunate, because I've had a lot of encouragement and support from my friends on Twitter, MarWorld, and most importantly from my amazing wife. Without her I couldn't do it; she doesn't get angry with me when I sit in my 'Man Cave' for hours, writing!"

PARANOID TALES OF NEUROSIS: THE COMIX ANTHOLOGY

Story & Art Joe Deagnon
chickenoutfit.com/paranoidtales/about/

The early years anthology from the left-field mind of horror- loving Canuck creator Joe Deagnon, this is 112 pages of underground counter-culture and nervy, explosive gut laughs Deagnon is a huge film fan, and his enthusiasm for all things B-movie and horror related shines on through the pages, with guides to how to shoot a slasher film (complete with Jason and Leatherface cameos), an interview with an exploitation horror director, and Evil Dead references aplenty

There's a crooked, four-mouthed bent to the humour, as scabrous as it is riotously funny, with swipes at corporate mentality, rock music, and sexual inadequacy. "Corporate Video Capers" packs all these traits into each page, the story straining to contain its ideas from rupturing acidic absurdity from every panel. Think Colin B. Morton and Chuck Death's legendary *Great Pop Things* crossed with Kevin Smith-style obscene slacker chat and you're about halfway there. Original, dirty, and fun. Read it.

INDIE SPOTLIGHT

ACCENT UK

Accent UK, co-run by writers **Colin Mathieson** and **Dave West**, have been publishing some of the most vibrant indie titles available for the past 15 years, earning themselves praise, kudos and even a prestigious award. **Dave West** tells **Miles Hamer** about awards, cowboys and wolfmen.

COMIC HEROES: Who are you working with on Accent UK and how did you come to do so?

Dave West: Back in the early 2000s there was quite an active small press scene in Manchester and a few of us decided to save costs for the forthcoming Bristol Comics Expo by sharing a table. From this group, Colin Mathieson and I shared a creative vision of our own imprint, which led to Accent UK being formed, and we've worked together ever since.

Producing annual anthologies gave me an opportunity to work with a large number of creators, which led to artistic collaborations with: Andy Bloor on *Wolfmen*, Gary Crutchley on *WesterNoir*, Marleen Lowe on *Fastest Man*, Joe Campbell on *Invisible Man* and INDIO! (Brad Tuttle) on *Stephenson's Robot*. I'm still working on projects with most of them, and additionally Ian Ashcroft and Gustavo Vargas Tatajeba.

Below: Accent UK's line includes steampunk sci-fi/horror anthology *Stephenson's Robot*, *Moments Of Adventure*, collecting some of Accent UK co-founder Colin Mathieson's historical adventure tales, and the award winning one-shot *Whatever Happened To The World's Fastest Man?*

CH: What's your writing process? Do you have the entire story mapped out in your head up-front?

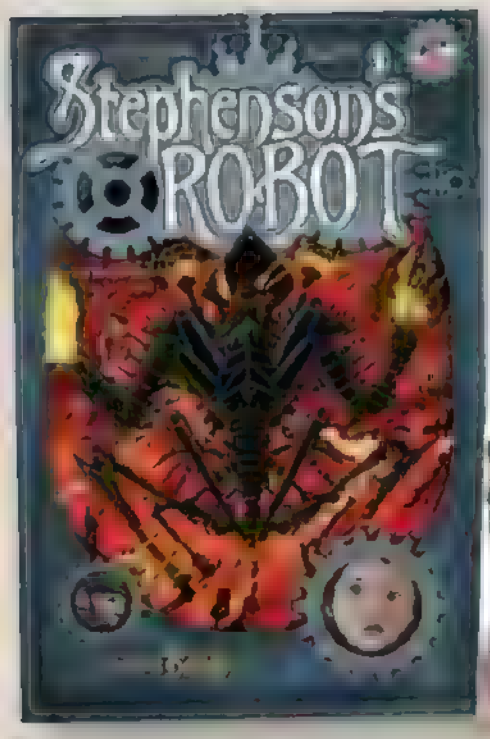
DW: I have an idea of the overall story but tend to let it evolve page by page. There are always exceptions, though, and with my *WesterNoir* co-creator Gary Crutchley it's a case of us discussing the story and then Gary writing and drawing the pages. Gary prefers not to work with heavy textual scripts, leaving me to add anything a long those lines as a final update on the finished page.

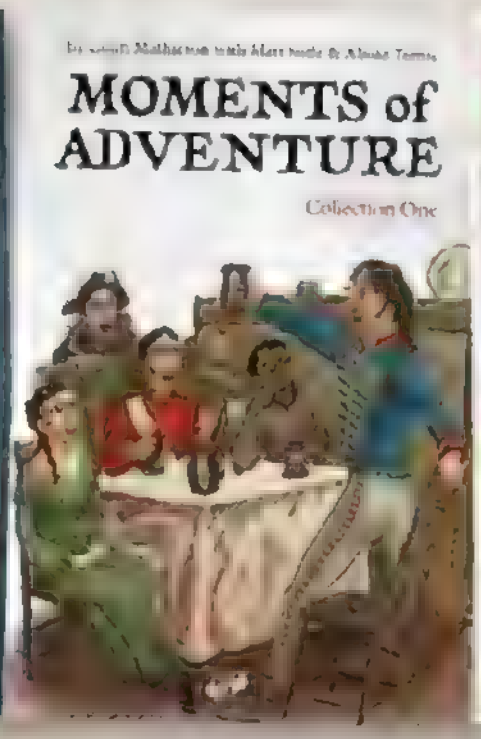
CH: What would you define as the Accent UK house style? Any genres or subjects you'd steer clear of?

DW: We like to tell stories with some depth and hopefully an emotional response. Stories that say something. We avoid spandex-wearing superheroes as a rule and lean towards historical fiction and fantasy more than other genres.

CH: You've been going for 15 years. How has the independent comic scene changed in that time?

DW: When we started there were never more than three shows a year in the UK and rarely more than ten independent comic self-publishers. So we tended to aim releases to coincide with these events, and consequently never produced more than three new titles a year. Now there are more than three shows a month, each with upwards of 100 self-publishers! Almost everyone today uses professional printers, which in the past was an expensive commodity few could afford. Although we don't use it ourselves, Kickstarter means that people can produce far more comics than before. This results in healthy competition, but while the quality of books has improved, I think there's a danger that the market cannot sustain the volume being produced.





He would leave the children until he was approaching 50. (His watch would keep track of Doyle Time, as he had always called it.)
He continued on his way but stopped mid-stride before turning back to the school

"Winning an Eagle Award justified what I do"

Dave West

CH: *Whatever Happened to the World's Fastest Man* won the 2010 Eagle Award for Best Black-and-White comic. How did that feel?
DW: The best thing about the award was that it really answered those people who consider small press as vanity press. Independent comics can be, and often are, at least as good as those produced by the major companies. Winning an Eagle Award justified what I do in so far as it told me that my peers respected my efforts enough to vote for our comic

CH: It's a very moving comic. Were you aware of that while creating it?
DW: I wanted to tell a tale about someone with an ability and how they tried to live a normal life desperately, until the day arrived when they were forced to use it at great cost to themselves. It's a very human story about sacrifice but I think also realistic, in that the central character is very human and makes some decisions that are a little self-centred

CH: Tell us about *WesterNoir*!
DW: *WesterNoir* is our ongoing western horror comic, which twists and turns its way to a resolution in about eight issues. It has been best described as "*Deadwood* meets *They Live*", and involves a monster hunter, Josiah Black, who travels around the Wild West killing monsters that only he can see, with the law not on his trail wanting to hang him for murder. As the story progresses Josiah begins to learn more about the organisation he works for and the man who leads it. He learns things that bring into question what he is doing. Are the monsters really monsters after all?

CH: You're moving away from anthologies. Why is that?
DW: We started with anthologies as a showcase for emerging creators alongside established ones, working with the likes of Steve Bissette, Kieron Gillen, Leah Moore and John Reppion. But while anthologies continue to sell well at conventions, they have become less popular with comic stores, which has hindered their wider distribution.

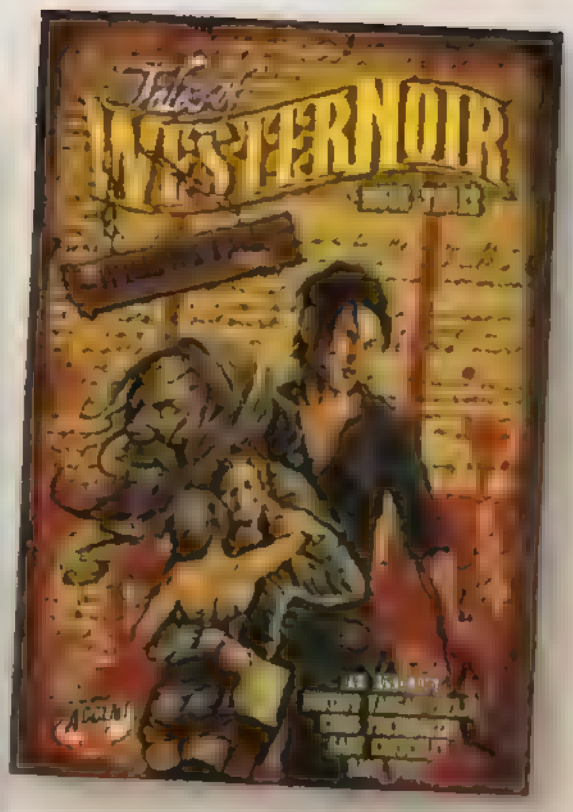
It may be that people now prefer self-contained stories or ongoing tales rather than the variety contained within anthology books. As anthologies have a large page count, they cost more to print and, due to the number of contributors involved, they are harder to pull together and tend to take up more time and money

Above: *Fastest Man* is almost certainly not the story you're expecting... but it will last as surely more you.

Below: Ongoing series *WesterNoir* makes the Wild West with a Lovecraftian bent

CH: What's next for Accent UK?
DW: We plan to continue our approach of focusing on our ongoing stories and characters like *WesterNoir* and *Stephenson's Robot* and Colin's historical fiction titles, *Moments Of Adventure* and *Zulu*, but remain receptive to submissions that move us

www.accentukcomics.com



INDIE SPOTLIGHT

MEANWHILE...

Originally founded in the late '90s, *Meanwhile...* returns has a striking new look and new stories. **Will Salmon** speaks to editor **John Anderson** about the ambitious anthology title...

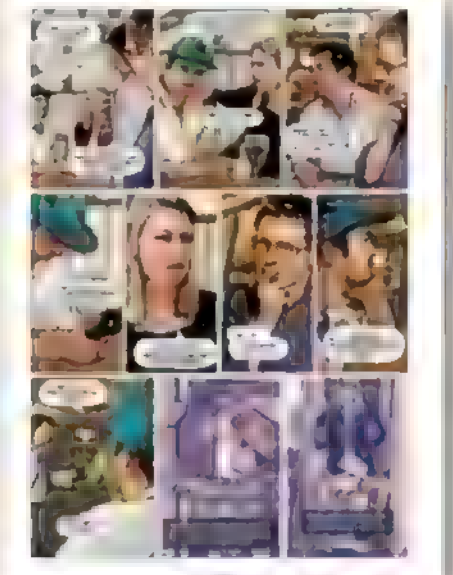
COMIC HEROES: Tell us a little about the history of *Meanwhile...*
John Anderson: *Meanwhile...* started n 1997 when I dec'ded I wanted to put togetner an antno ogy t t'e to promote and support a t nese terr fic wr ters and art'sts I knew wno were creat'ng tnese ove y stor es tnat weren't ong enougn to pe pub sned 'ndependent y put wno were find ng tnat decent antno ogy t t es were few and far petween. We d d four 'ssues, w tn support from an Arts Counc' Grant, tne fourtn ssue pe ng 96 pages ong

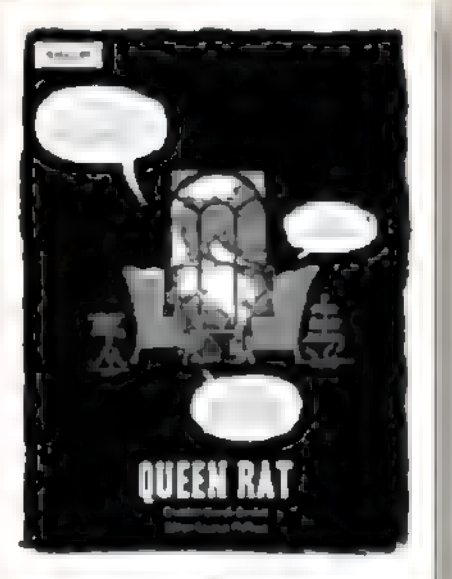
Below: Issue 5 of *Meanwhile...* re aunches w th a new s ze and ook, and most mportant y, more pages

Severa years ater, I dec'ded to return to tne antno ogy 'dea as a means of enap 'ng Gary Spencer M dge to comp ete *Strangehaven*, and to nave a Soar ng Pengu n Press t t e com'ng out regu ar y, 'n order to keep tne name v's'p e

CH: You've just relaunched with a new format. How has *Meanwhile...* changed?
JA: We're a p t sma er put w tn more pages. W tn tne 'ncrease 'n pages, we can no onger nave tne pook sadd ed-st tcned put tne p nd ng 's sect'on-sewn Tn's a ows tne pook to e flatter tnan perfect p nd'ng and stand up to mu t p e read ngs. It st conta ns Gary Spencer M dge's *Strangehaven* and Dav d H ne and Mark Stafford's *The Bad Bad Place*

CH: *Strangehaven* is great! What do you think remains so appealing about this series?
JA: It's nte 'gent, tnougntfu , pr ant y wr tten and wonderfu y ustrated And t nas tnat ne uctap e qua ty of strangeness tnat's so rare y seen 'n any med um. Gary's created





Above: Ongoing stories include *Strangehaven*, while *Queen Rat*'s Sarah Gordon begins new series *The Collector*

Below: Hine and Stafford's *The Bad Bad Place*, which explores the part of town you know you shouldn't visit.

a story that anyone who delves into it is compelled to see how it ends

CH: How about David Hine and Mark Stafford's *The Bad Bad Place*?
JA: They're a terrific team, those two I loved their *The Man Who Laughs*, and I've enjoyed David's work since I first read *Strange Embrace*. I knew I needed a second ongoing story to complement *Strangehaven* and approached David to provide something. He agreed and suggested working again with Mark. The result is an unpleasant, visceral slide into the bowels of Hell. Great fun!

Every town has one: that derelict building, that overgrown plot, where you just know you shouldn't go – *The Bad Bad Place*. But places like that, they seem to have a fascination, an allure of their own. But you mustn't listen to the sirens call, the promise of dreams come true. Because that's the path, and the hook will pierce you to your very soul.

Yeah, I know I haven't actually told you anything. But where would the fun be in that?

CH: There's a new series by Sarah Gordon starting this issue, *The Collector*. What's that about?
JA: It's a gothic horror story about a man who invents a machine that can capture the voices of living things. Not record – capture! It steals the essence of the sound itself, turning mute the original owner: birds, small animals, people. Sarah's work is just gorgeous. She keeps getting better and better.

CH: How much more complicated is producing an anthology than a single ongoing story?
JA: Well, trying to juggle any number of creators is always going to be harder than just dealing with one or two. That having been said, it's been a most completely drama-free. I think – I hope – this will continue as *Meanwhile...* goes on. I want the anthology to be a place where creators want to be seen. Yes, I try to provide some editorial guidance where I feel it's needed and I expect that, as things progress, I'll be putting writers and artists together which will require more overview than simply accepting completed stories. But so far, everyone's been very, very accommodating.

CH: How do you choose the strips to feature in the title?
JA: I work my way through the submissions I have as well as trawling through various websites and foreign anthologies looking for stories that catch my eye. I'm bringing in some foreign language work too, which opens up the catchment for each issue. We had Yuko Rabbit for the first five issues who's Japanese. In #6 we have stories that were originally in Russian, Spanish and Portuguese. I'm looking at stories from all over the world. Because, first and foremost, I want good story.

CH: How healthy do you think the UK indie scene is at the moment?
JA: Absolutely vibrant. There are so many astonishing creators going right now. It's an exciting time to be a comics reader. There's no limit to the variety of story being told, and I love the narratives being explored.

CH: What are your goals for *Meanwhile...* in the coming years?
JA: I'd like to get to the point where *Meanwhile...* becomes an event. Not just that the issue comes out but that people want to get the next issue because they want to see what I've brought for them. A bit like a quarterly comic version of *Granta*. In the back of my mind though, is that *Strangehaven* ends in another seven issues. I'll need something to replace it with. Do you think I could get Alan Moore to finish *Big Numbers* in quarterly instalments?

www.soaringpenguinpress.com

"It's a visceral slide into the bowels of Hell. Great fun!"
John Anderson

INDIE SPOTLIGHT

ATTIC STUDIOS

Home to the rambunctious and rib-tickling, British indie publisher Attic Studios is a trio of talent and tasteless gags. **Miles Hamer** caught up with comic collaborators **Dan Harris**, **Kris Carter** and **Jim Bampfield** to find out more about Lou Scannon, Bruce Outback and typing monkeys.

COMIC HEROES: So, how did you guys and the studio get together?
Dan Harris: J'm and I met 'n a product des'gn stud o way back n 1997. We first got to meet Kr's 'n '98 when our GNVQ course d d an ntroductory course to An'mat'on w th Kr's' Foundat on course. We got on over a ove of *Star Wars* and tnen, tne fo ow'ng year, a started an HND 'n An'mat'on togetner.

Years ater, when Kr's found out I nad tn's nuge un verse pu t around *Lou Scannon*, t seemed somewnat nev tab e tnat we wou d end up do'ng someth'ng togetner. Wno knew tnen about a tne fame and r cnes tnat t wou dn't ead to?
Kris Carter: Att'c Stud os 's named tnat because we used to do our first year an mat'on work in tne att'c of tne campus bu d ng. A so, my nome stud o 's an att c, and tnat's wnere we keep most of tne stock...

Below: Art for *Lou Scannon* and *Druid Investigations* by Dan Harr s.

CH: *Lou Scannon* seems to come from a distinctly British tradition of bawdy, quirky space hi-jinx. What inspired its creation?
DH: I nave a tn'ng for 'nappropr'ate numour. I'm somewnat sarcast'c and ratner cyn ca . Is tnat synonymous w tn be ng Br t'sn? Pernaps. . Genera y, tnougn, tne way we preak 't down 's ke tn's: f 't fee s ke 't's *Red Dwarf*-y, tnat's Kr s If 't fee s somewnat *Monty Python*-esque, tnat's J m. If 't fee s ratner dark and/or tw sted? Propab y me Put tne tnree togetner and we seem to nave someth ng tnat works

CH: The *Lou Scannon* universe feels lively and populated. How much of the backstory and world had you worked out before starting, or is it more spontaneous than that?
DH: I nad tne ent re un verse p anned out ooooong before 'ssue 1 came out. I nad a start, m dd e and end for the ent re tn ng *Lou Scannon* was or'g'na y my tn rd year fi m as part of my BA 'n un'. After graduat'ng in 2002, I st oved tne universe and d dn't want to just et t go, so I started to flesn out tne backstory
Jim Bampfield: As tne say'ng goes, a monkey n tt ng keys at random on a typewr ter keyboard for an 'nfin te

"I had the entire universe planned out long before issue 1"

Dan Harris on Lou Scannon

amount of time will almost surely type a given text, such as the complete works of William Shakespeare. But at around supper-time on Wednesday he will have written *Lou Scannon*.

CH: Can we expect any more *Druid Investigations* after its initial run?
DH: Absolutely! This comic is a massive labour of love for me! Once the initial storyline is done, I hope to be able to do a lot of one-shot issues as well as ongoing story arc ones. The best way I can describe what I want to do with it is like Mignola did with *Hellboy*: a bunch of issues that are one-off, standalone stories and then others that are three-to-five issue arcs.

CH: Tell us about *Bruce Outback*.
KC: Australia's greatest detective, sent back in time to solve unsolved crimes with the help of his koala! It's fun, a bit more kiddie-accessible than *Lou* or *Druid*. It's also a heartening example of the kind of nonsense you can forge into an actual comic when four grown men and women get trashed and brainstorm in the back of a taxi.

CH: Your comics steer towards humour. Why's that then?
KC: Cos we're hilarious. Actually, no, it just seems to be the way we write stuff. If something makes you laugh, you remember it more. And if something we write makes us laugh, we want to write more of it.

CH: Would you consider a move towards more traditionally "serious" tone or subjects?
KC: Absolutely. I think all three of us have other ideas percolating away that would suit darker, more sombre stories. Dan's "Bunker" strips (**patreon.com/DanHarris**) are definitely more serious, but even then that's not totally devoid of humour. That being said, I don't think we'd ever write something that didn't have at least a glimmer of humour in it.
JB: Well... I do have this one idea. A small boy witnesses the brutal murder of his parents. He decides he must dedicate his life to the pursuit of justice. But how will this imposing figure of revenge manifest itself? He is without inspiration until one day a large emu bursts through the study window and... Well... I've given away too much already.

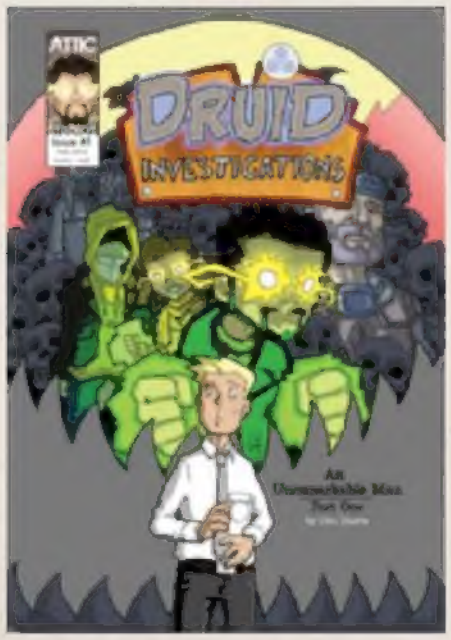
CH: How essential do you find print and attending conventions?
DH: I love doing conventions and think they're the most important part. People invest in *you*. Showing your passion and enthusiasm and giving them something to believe or invest in... you don't really get that digitally. People will come back to you digitally but they're less likely to take that initial punt on you that way!
KC: We all prefer the physical feel of a printed book to reading it on-screen, and the bulk of our sales come from meeting fans and new readers in person at conventions. Digital's great, but we're not foregoing print for as long as we can avoid it.

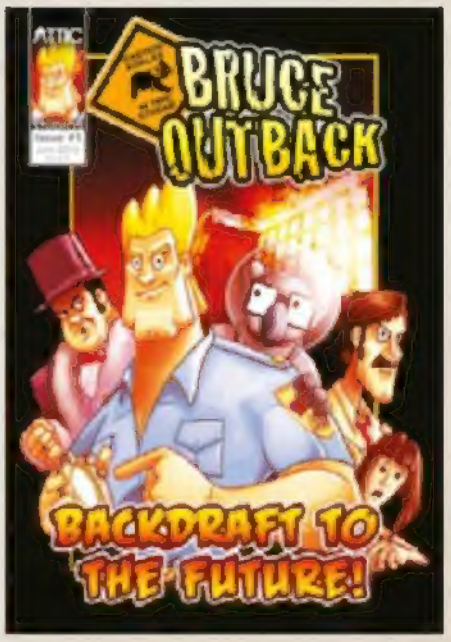
Above: Say g'day to *Bruce Outback* by Kris Carter.

Below: The Attic Studios line of titles.

CH: What next for Attic Studios?
DH: We're hoping to keep pumping out *Lou Scannon* books, and fit *Druids* and *Bruce* into the gaps as we can. Ideally, we'd love to get the studio to a point where it *is* the day-job, but that's easier said than done.
KC: I'm currently in the process of putting finishing touches to a card game I've been working on with two of our friends, one being a regular collaborator, Gavin Mitchell, the other being a proper doctor and everything: Anthony Caravaggi.
JB: Total World Domination, the first person on Mars and a spot of tea... Oh, and a biscuit.

www.atticstudios.website





MY LIFE IN COMICS

TONY LEE

WRITER OF COUNTLESS *DOCTOR WHO* COMICS AND THINGS

FIRST COMIC I EVER READ

It was a 1960s *Iron Man*. I can't honestly tell you what it was, but I remember he was guesting with the Fantastic Four. It looked like Kirby. The second one was a British '70s reprint of Nick Fury. It was so mental. One page of a Steranko Nick Fury story is a four-part miniseries now. This guy compressed everything. I think that was a big influence.

FIRST INFLUENCE ON MY WORK

Alan Moore, by far. Everybody says that, but that's because we all grew up reading his Time Twisters. I still remember one vividly, a mickey-take of *Dragnet*. It was basically Joe Friday and his partner. They were the time detectives. Everybody I speak to always goes, "Oh yeah, that one." That one really got me. It made me think, "Wow, you can do that." Warren Ellis and Neil Gaiman, when they started doing the darker stuff and Vertigo turned up, that fascinated me. Delano doing *Hellblazer*, too.

FIRST PRO COMICS WORK

February 2004, *X-Men Unlimited* #1. I wrote an 11-page story starring Sage. I was one of dozens of new writers they contacted, so I had to earn every step I made. I chose Sage partly because she was a favourite and unused character, but also because I knew that at least 50 percent of the other pitches would be Wolverine or main team. I sent in four pitches in total; the other three were exactly that.

MY FAVOURITE COMIC EVER

Tough call. I think it's *Laika* by Nick Abadzis. It's the story of the first dog into space, and I've told Nick many times that it's my favourite book ever. I don't know what it was that touched me so about it, but it's always stuck with me.

THE BEST COMIC I'VE WORKED ON

Hope Falls, I think, is one of my best creator-owned books, but I think one of my best works is *Doctor Who: The Forgotten*. That's the one people come up to me and tell me, "You made me cry." It was probably one of my favourites to write as well, because at the time, I never thought I'd get another chance. I threw everything in there, including the kitchen sink. And I'm a massive fanboy. At the time, America had a year gap between seasons. When we were showing Donna Noble, America was still showing the beginnings of Martha Jones. And then halfway through *Forgotten*'s run, that changed. Suddenly, BBC America had it, and it jumped a year. We had Martha as the companion, now Martha's not a companion. So how do we put that into the story? We were doing massive rewrites. It was the most Whovian story – we were starting at the beginning, getting to the end, and then starting back at the beginning while changing the end.

THE CHARACTER I'D MOST LIKE TO WRITE

Captain Britain, without a measure of a doubt. Me and Mark Buckingham often have conversations about how we'd do it, because he's also a massive fan. He's a very understated character. And I would really kill to do Booster Gold. I've gotten close a couple of times. One day, maybe.

THE COMICS I'M CURRENTLY READING

A lot of DC and Marvel. I'd walked away a little after New 52 but Rebirth is bringing back old favourites. Loving *Doctor Aphra, Wicked + Divine, Saga*. I'm doing a Titan Whoniverse book soon, so I've been reading up on everything they've been doing and loving it. *Sheriff of Babylon* is a must pull. So much stuff...

Top: Lee pitched a Sage story partly because he knew everyone else would be focusing on Wolverine.
Above: *The Forgotten* was IDW's second Doctor Who story arc, and the first officially sanctioned spin-off to feature all ten incarnations of the Doctor to date. It was an anniversary celebration deliberately recalling all ten.

Did you know that European forests, which provide wood for making paper and many other products, have grown by 44,000km^2 over the past 10 years? That's more than 1,500 football pitches every day![†]

Love magazines? You'll love them even more knowing they're made from natural, renewable and recyclable wood

[†]UNFAO, Global Forest Resources Assessment 2005-2015.

Two Sides is a global initiative promoting the responsible use of print and paper which, when sourced from certified or sustainably managed forests, is a uniquely powerful and natural communications medium.

There are some great reasons to #LovePaper
Discover them now,
twosides.info

TWO SIDES

THE UK & IRELAND'S BIGGEST
MODERN POP CULTURE EVENTS
MCM LONDON
COMIC CON
@MCMCOMICCON
26-28 MAY 2017
THE EXCEL - ROYAL VICTORIA DOCKS
KIDS GO FREE
TICKETS ON SALE NOW
mcmcomiccon.com
*Kids Go Free, Children 10 and Under go free if accompanied by a paying adult. Max 2 free children per adult, applies to General Entry tickets from 11am each day.